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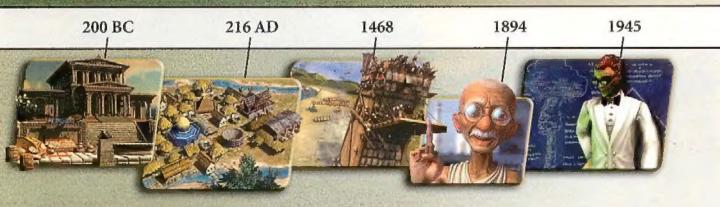
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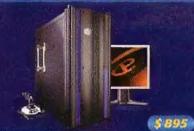
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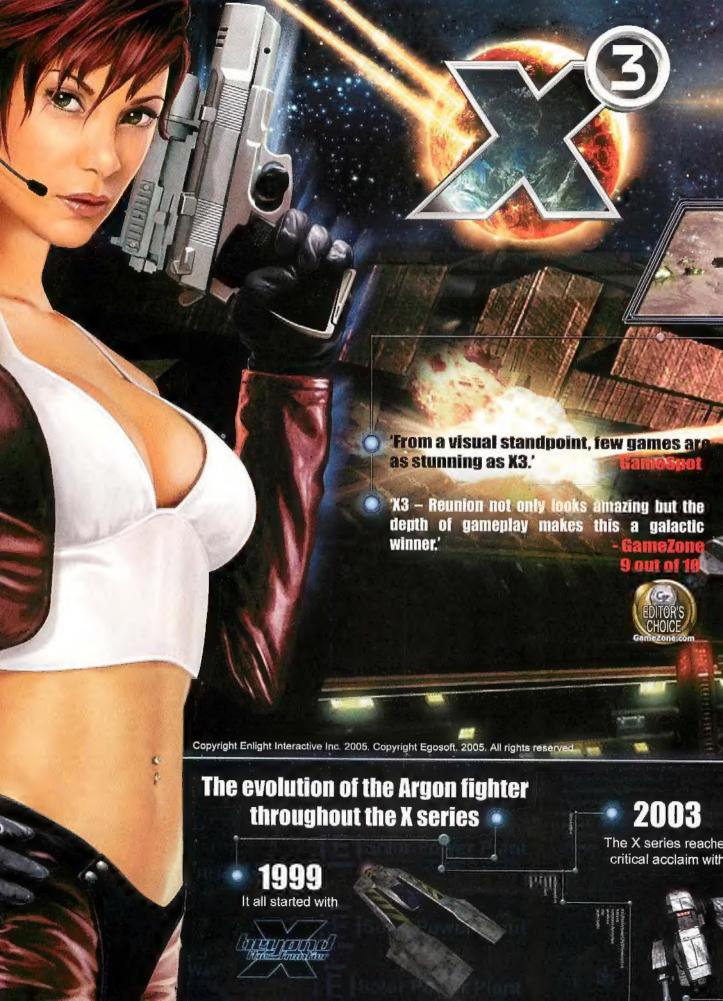


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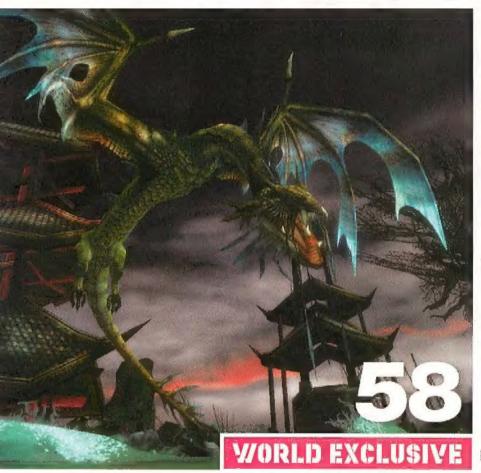
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GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

Eight months and 1 million copies later, ArenaNet's *Guild Wars* still astounds. In this month's world-exclusive cover story, we pull the curtain off the next chapter of this groundbreaking MMORPG.

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Little Lord Sunshine wants money for nothing (and his chicks for free)





LOGANS RUN.1UP.COM

Logan came all the way from New Zesland just to make a great CGW disc for you. Well, not really. He did come from New Zesland, but not because of you. Sony, And he keeps a better blog than most CGW staffers, too.

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Gee, think our editor-in-chief needs therapy? Check out the CGW Sucks club. Then check out who moderates it, Looks like someone needs a hug!

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Intrigued by Gulld Wars after reading our cover story? Check out this club. With almost 500 members, it's one of the most popular PC gaming clubs at 1up.com.

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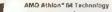
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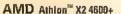








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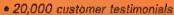
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THOU SHALT NOT FRAG?

Judge not and all that kinda stuff



SO, WE HAVE A NEWS STORY THIS MONTH THAT, if my radar is correct, will probably generate a fair, amount of mail, Why? Because it treads on sensitive ground: religion. Specifically, contributing writer Matt Peckham takes a look at the phenomenon of evangelical groups using online games like Battlefield 2 to spread their message to others.

What I want to say up front here, in case it's not clear in the place—though I believe it is clear—is that we are not passing judgment on what these groups: are doing, nor on anyone who either is for (or against):

this kind of thing. We are merely reporting on the fact that this is going on and letting those involved speak for themselves on the matter.

Though I can't imagine it really needs to be said, the gang here at CGW comprises folks with different belief systems and different degrees of intensity and/orcommitment to their faith-and, like most people, we tend to keep it a private matter. When this story was passed around, it elicited a different response from every single person on staff. Some think that what these groups are trying is a smart and understandable tactic. Others think it's annoying. Some think it's hypocritical of Christian groups to be playing violent videogames in the first place. Others have no problem with it at all. -

My point is: Read the article. Decide for yourself. And then let us know what you think (at cowletters@ziffdavis.com). Because there is no right or wrong answer.

And in other news: Last month, I praised Sony Online for coming clean on the problems with Star Wars Galaxies and for offering new, more accessible gemeplay. At the time, I said it was "way too early" to assess the new features. Now we've had enough time. Read about it, and weep, on page 76:n JEFF GREEN EDITION OF CHIEF

New Playing: Call of Duty 2, Tickel to Rido Online, DWA 1UP.com Blog: cgwjelf.1UP.com





KRISTEN SALVATORE MANAGING EDITOR

Kris has been pondering the mysteries of life lately, wondering, among other things, from the holidays have gotten so commercialized and why Ryan keeps assigning her rengey games to review. Why, Ryan? WHY?!?
New Playing: In the Snow
1UP.com Blog: kristenss.1UP.com



DARREN GLADSTONE SENIOR EDITOR (FEATURES)

Like some mad scientist, Darren is LIKE SOME MAD SCIENTISS, CATTER 18
inching new ways to rewire everyone's
apartment using a PC as a central
media server and an Xbox 360 as a
remote client device. Pretty sexy, eh? New Playing: Call of Duly 2, City of Villains 1UP.com Blog: cgw_gizmo.1UP.com;



After writing this month's cover story, Ryan experienced another *Guild Wars* relapse. Oh well...who needs sleep masjes. ON went, and these scho-nuking elementalist/mesmer? Now Playing: *Gulid Wars*. 1URcom Blog: cow-yan, 1URcom



SHAWN ELLIOTT EDITOR (PREVIEWS)

Where's the Pulitzer for the world's one and only editor to score an interview with legendary gamemaker Lord Gaylen (Scorpion Slayer)? Now Playing: F.E.A.R., Indigo Prophecy 1UR.com Blog: agmshawn, 1UR.com



LOGAN PARR DISC PRODUCEN

Logan has been watching way too much South Park tately. He nectos dialogue from the show and interrupts meetings to ask, "Who killed Kenny?!" Plus, he's started to dress different... New Playing: Prince of Persia 3, Call of Duly 2, The Sims 2 1UP.com Blog: logans_run.1UP.com



MICHAEL JENNINGS:

This month our art director engaged Internation of an director angiged himself once again in the ancient craft of designing the primitive form of communication you're probably reading in the bathroom.

Now Playing: City of Villains

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Engineered specifically for the PC with enhanced graphics, unnerving AI, and classic pulse-pounding close-quarter battles.



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UBISOFT

DEAR CGW, DROP DEAD, LOVE, YOU

LETTER OF THE MONTH



EMPIRE STRIKES OUT, EPISODE 2

Star Wars Galaxies changed drastically with the new game enhancements, upsetting many people (myself included). Here's a quote from the second took in your January Issue (#258, page 22): "Some of the omissions already have a handful of creature handlers and bioengineers ready for rebellion, and SOE has even offered a refund to unhappy players who can't accept change."

The refund offered is for the expansion pack *Trials of Obr-Wan*, not, as your statement suggests, for subscribing to *SWG*. Nobody is getting a refund for subscriptions. The real reason for a refund on that expansion pack is because the new game enhancements for *Galaxies* were announced two days after the expansion went live and the masses called SOE on it. Many people, beyond the mistreated creature-handler class, have cried foul on SOE for its baltand-switch tactics. I'm looking forward to the next month's "rereview."

David Davis

After receiving a record number of complaint e-mails, we went to the source for a straight enswer. SOE Austin's director of development, Todd Fiola, says, "About halfway through the development of [Trials of Obi-Wan], we knew that some classes would be cut." He assures us, though, that all the focus groups were very supportive and "all the affected classes amounted to about 1 percent of the player base." So, what would Fiels do differently if he had to do it all over again? "Leave more time between the release of [Obi-Wan] and the new game enhancements]—like four to six months," he says.

In the meantime, flip to our SWG rereview on page 76.

CRANK. COUNTERCRANK

I hope I'm not alone in this. Has anyone else noticed that the magazine as a whole is trending toward becoming a trade magazine and is becoming less about what's out now, what they are about, and now to play them well?

The reviews are getting shorter, often leaving you guessing about the game experience. If it wasn't for your star rating system, I wouldn't be able to tell whether I should pursue further information gathering before making a purchasing decision. Your tech section is still excellent, but little else is a must-read. Tom vs. Bruce simply has to go. I find absolutely nothing of value in their juvenile spew.

I know you Left Coasters are in touch with your feelings out there, and your marketing people must be telling you to write to a younger, more "hip" demographic, but has your readership changed that much?

C. Kent Henson

Fortunately, Kent was kind enough to post his thoughts in the CGW forum online (boards.1UP.com), which earned him the following response from another reader, who said it better than we could. Meanwhile, us "Left Coasters" will have a group hug.

I think you actually are pretty alone. The market has changed, and CGW has had to change with it

Geez, dude, Tom vs. Bruce is an entertainment piece, not a thesis. Watching Bruce get diamantled in nearly every RTS they play is one of the highlights of the magazine; it makes me laugh and shows me that I'm not alone. If anything, it's a strategy guide for what not to do. Why waste an entire segment of the magazine on strategy tips when there are millions of websites designed to provide just that?

As for the reviews, try reading the occasional preview. There, you find out about all of the little technical tidbits left out of the reviews because they've already been printed in the previews. For the larger games, such as *HL2* and *Doom 3*, multiple previews told us everything short of the color of the lead programmer's underpants. In the review, all that's left is to determine what is fun and what isn't. If anything, we are getting more information about most of these games than we ever have before.

Chad Owens

What he said.



SHAWN = HOT!

Thank you for the awesome magazine you guys work so hard on. Reading your reviews helps me decipher which game I want to play next. My brother and dad also thank you because now they

can laugh at the cyber cate's manager when I beat his butt every Friday night P.S. Hey, Shawn Elliott: Are you married? Because you are really hot.

Keiko Jayne

Seeing as how you're such a fan, Kelko, we have a treat for you: an undoctored photo of Shawn at work. Enjoy.







Those pasteon ad covers are great. The post office's mangler chews them now instead of the mag.—Bab

There are no elves, fairles, or dwarves in Asheron's Call. Well, I much you can't play as them.
—Sibelia









DE 259



GOD MODE

Fragging for king, country, and creator



PREVIEW olimer Co

Sam Fisher plays superspy again...with a 24-flavored twist in Splinter Cell Double Agent



INTERVIEW John Romero No bulls*** Q and A with the master of Doom



PREVIEW Auto Assault Ten and two: We go hands on with the massively multi-

CULTURE

AA GUNS THOOM THOOM THOOM in the distance as RAF Liberators roar overhead. Private Carey stays low in the tranch and sights down his Lee-Enfield "Ich sahe eint" scream Jerries further up the line, instead of answering, Carey turns to his crouching allies, even as German grenades plunk and rattle behind them, "For the greater glory of God!" he shouts, and, echoing his cry, they leap from cover to charge the enemy.

ELEPHANT IN THE GAME ROOM

God, Christianity, religion-probably not the first words that come to mind when you're settling into your comfy chair to cap Doom 3's infernal fiends. But pause a moment and consider the following: According to the religious data repository Adherents.com, over 75 percent of U.S. citizens are Christian. Compare that to the Entertainment Software Association's assertion that 50 percent of all Americans play videogames. The average gamer is 30 years old. Adult garners have been playing an average of 12 years, and in 2004 alone, 19 percent of those over age 50 clocked time thumbing a gamepad in front of a television. Combine those stats, and it stands to reason that a significant percentage of U.S. gamers are also actively religious.

So what about the famous fifth commandment, the one that says, "Thou shall not kil?" Or the Garden of Gethsemane scene in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus instructs the Roman soldiers; "For all who take the sword will perish by the sword"? Is sneaking behind your enemy, for instance, and snapping his or her neck acceptable make-believe? (You can do precisely this in Splinter Cell Chaos Theory's visceral spies-versus-mercs mode, which also opens an audio channel between victim and assailant, allowing killers to gloat.) And is it possible to reconcile the nonviolent aspects of Christianity with the pervasive themes of violence in today's digital entertainment?

"We view games as just games," says Keridrick Kenerly, founder of +CGO+, Christian Gamers Online (www.christiangamers.net) "They all boil down to a few things: They have a goal, they have a reward for the goal, and they have a set of rules that need to be followed to reach the goal. The violence in most games isn't something we get worked up about. It's merely 'presentation,' simply a way to convey an experience to players so they can follow the rules to reach the goal." Abstract games like checkers chess and Monopoly operate in the same fashion, Kenerly argues-they merely employ different presentation methods.

+CGO r is one of several Internet groups formed in recent years to wed love for God with passion for gaming. While +CGO+ itself doesn't endorse any particular game, it maintains a list of affiliates that includes servers nosting war themed games like Battlefield 2 and America's Army. 'We're a group of Christians with a common love for videogames." explains Kenerly. "We've grown very close in our relationships. We commend each other, we rebuke each other when necessary, and we build each



UNHOLY MMO-LY?

WHILE IT'S ALL YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT letely, with Congressional threats to legislate mature-themed videogame sales, violence tan't the only complex ethical issue religious gamers face. If you're old enough to remember Ozzy Osboume when he (purportedly) bit the head off a bat during a live performance (or was that a dove in the office of a record executive?), you'll remember the furor that briefly erupted in the 1950s over the role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons and ka supposed links to Satanism.

Since then, things have notably calmed, J.K. Howling's Harry Potter books take their release season licks from some for celebrating witches warlooks, and arcane magic, but the recent sixth Potter book averaged record-shattering sales of 250,000 copies per hour on opening day, and by and large D&D is now played in its numerous paper and videogame incarnations by religious and secular gamers alike. Fantasy as an industry has never fared better since. Peter Jackson's mumphant Lord of the Rings films, which left in their wake a gathering tide wave of films, books, and games filled with: pagan as well as religious symbology. World of WarCraft alone, for example, has throngs of magic spells with names like Holy Strike, Drain Soul, and Hellfire, and furnishes several of its muselve zones with demonio creatures. How are religious gamers responding?

"That's really a matter of personal taste," says, Kendrick Kenerty of +CGO+. "We don't have any requirements about what types of games our users play, though personelly, I prefer more tactical, military-style games."

Longtime gamer Cheryl Gress founded the site Christ Centered Game Reviews (www.ccgr. org) after "buying one too many games with occult symbols in them." Gress started CCGR to specifically warn other Christians and parents about the content of potentially objectionable

games. The game that got me to start CCGR was Ultima IX," she explains. "To make magic, li had to collect reagents and light candles around pentagrams. That crossed the line, and I wasn't comfortable playing it."

Offered a choice, Gress prefers violence to games influenced by occult symbols: "It depends on what and why I'm killing something. Whenever possible, I turn off blood and gore so it's more or less like laser tag. I see nothing wrong with war games, since war is real, and also don't feel guilty killing moneters.

Troy Lyndon of Left Behind Games, on the other hand, views occult imagery as less problematic and raises as more sinister the issue of violence lacking context. "What's more demaging are games that show killing and then let the bodies disappear, desensitizing gamers to what's going on," explains Lyndon. "Although: seeing hundreds of dead bodies in Left Behind Eternal Forces at the end of a homitic battle wasn't our original intent, we can't help but stay away from desensitizing gamers. It's our hope that we don't and up with a Mature-rated game...but we might. Our argument is that it's: more humane to show the reality of death their to desensitize in the name of a lighter rating.

"It's not just graphic content that concerns us," says Men of God International member Brian Church. "It's the symbols and messag that are put into the game. For instance, MOG isn't going to promote or condone a division centered Doom 3. It's full of pentagrams, and the whole game [focuses on] hell."

Given a choice between violent activity and occult symbolism in a game, Church would? choose violence. "It's simply for this reason," he explains; "The violence in videogemes is fake; however, a symbol in any form is still the symbol. If I see a pentagram in a book and then I see it in a game, that symbol is just as real in the game as it is in the book."



VIOLENCE ISN'T THE ONLY COMPLEX ETHICAL ISSUE RELIGIOUS GAMERS FACE





other up." But it goes beyond simple camaraderie for +CGO+, Kenerty continues, "We're also evengelists. Our platform is in-game and on our forums, and we tell people how it is. We're not ashamed of the gospet of Christ, and we openly promote Jesus and our belief in Him." In other words, +CGO+ actively proselytizes, taking advantage of the internet's fluid and capacious nature to transmit the group's Christian message, Adds Kenerly, "What could be better than spreading the Good News and playing videogames?"

DEUS EX INTERNETUM

Owen Parker, aka Colonel Zaph, is an "A," or 18-years-or-older adult (as opposed to YC" or 13-to-17-year-old youth corp) member of the milelary-themed Christian online gaming site Men of God international, "We're more than just a gaming clan-we're a full-blown ministry," Parker says. "Right now, everything is online. I'm the commanding officer of the Men of God radio network. for example. We have our own online radio station and expect to have two streams soon." MOG, in fact, offers a wide array of services that circulate through and extend beyond its game portais. "We offer counseling, we have actual certified Christian counselors as well as preachers that are on the leadership team," explains Parker, "And we have Sunday-night services, and so on. We do a lot of outreach work and provide family-centered game servers that focus on the Christian topic,"

For Parker and MOG, taking the ministry to the network-connected masses is just culture catching up with technology. "If you look at Christian gaming as using the online medium, I see it as just another way to go out there and share the truth of

God with everybody else," he says, "For instance, look at one diametrically opposed viewpoint: pomography. It's broadcasting through the whole Internet like crazy because its purveyors know there's a wide audience, more so than if it was in print, and that's true of violence and so many things that are on the Web. Conversely, the entire spectrum of garning has blossomed, which means there are tons of people out there who want to go online and have conversations about this stuff."

Some groups are making it a point to initiate the conversation. Bill Guidry handles PR for MOG and says that when it comes to spreading MOG's message, the organization employs a technique it calls "combat revival outreach ministry." "We purposely visit public gaming servers, several members together, and share our faith and invite gamers. to visit and fellowship with us," explains Guidry, "When gamers come onto a server, we generally ask them a variety of questions designed to get them thinking. I tell people we might not be the best tacticians or No. 1 ranked teams, but we're the first who will pray with and for you."

Christ Centered Game Reviews' Cheryl Gress describes her group's ministerial approach as intentionally strong. "People laugh at many of our reviews and perspectives on games," she says. "However, if they don't laugh, our message is weak."

Kenerly says +CGO+'s message is broadcast constantly on the group's official game rigs. "We use our Ghost Recon and Battlefield 2 servers to spread the Good News," Kenerty explains, "While In the game, the player will see messages every few minutes, like 'We want you to know that... Jesus loves you!' and 'No Jesus-no peace; know Jasus-know peace."

None of this surprises Troy Lyndon, CEO of Left Behind Games (www.leftbehindgames.com) and publisher of upcoming real-time strategy game. Left Behind: Etemal Forces, Lyndon believes the idea of virtual communities as vehicles for religious expression is simply tradition trickling into contemporary mediums, "For hundreds of years the Gospel was apread by word of mouth," he notes. "Then the printing press allowed individuals to own a Bible. Radio and television gave ministries the ability to reach millions simultaneously worldwide. Online games are just the latest in communications technology, so it's natural to assume such virtual communities will be used to bring together large numbers of people for a variety of purposes, including prayer."

Has the switchover to online ministry altered the way groups like Men of God proselytize? MOG's Parker believes it's merely a togistical difference "Yes, your evangelism tactics change, your outreach tactics," he explains, "For instance, you cen't see the person face to face. If they're just typing in the game, you have to get around a lot of the noise; you have to get right to the heart of the matter because you only have their attention. for a short time. Sometimes you can get them on TeamSpeak, and so now you're having a voice conversation, but there's still a little bit of a communication barrier. There are challenges to be met, but lots of opportunities, too."

"Most MOG members are ready to talk to other players as a matter of course," adds Guidry, "Many times it's in the midst of these struggles that people are watching us to see how we react. Through this, many have become very appreciative of who we are and what we stand for," in addition, MOG also relies on its "recon," or online administrators, to patrol its servers. "While we can't police 24/7, we try to establish our servers as consistently 'clean," Guidry explains, "When we do experience

"WE'RE ALSO EVANGELISTS. OUR PLATFORM 15 IN-GAME AND ON OUR FORUMS"

-KENDRICK KENERLY



gameplay itself pulls no punches, "Everyone knows that the heart of a great RTS game is all-out battle, and Left Behind: Eternal Forces includes the fast and funous combat gamers expect to see." It's not just the game's violence that may raise evebrows with some Christians, however. Lyndon says the multiplayer mode will offer players some tough ethical choices, "The world is set in the End Times, and in the single-player game you're fighting the forces of the Antichrist. But in multiplayer mode, you can play the other side; thus, we really have something for everyone." According to Lyndon, this will allow players to understand more deeply how their actions balance against various consequences,

For similar reasons, Men of God's members gravrtate toward historically themed games. "It's not so much the emphasis on the violence," says Parker. "It's the emphasis on service in WWII, on honor, and on history—it's a common theme that unites people from different countries." When it comes to other games without a historical or service-oriented theme, however, Parker has strong reservations. "When you do start taking about games like WarCraft or EverQuest, the influences in the game have nothing to do with honor, nothing to do with God, and it would be nice to reach the people who play those games, but those same people play other games (as well). We feel that, since God's in control of this ministry. God will determine where it goes and what we play. God will bring to us who

He wants us to talk to or to help."

Parker summarizes what drove him to marry gaming with worship by drawing a companson to Christian writer John Eldredge's book Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul According to Eldredge, God designed men to be dangerous. "A man desires to be the king of his house, the warrior, the protector, and the lover of his family," explains Parker, "The warnor side of man we see abused in this world, but innately, man desires to be that warrior. I've talked to a lot of guys that play on MOG, and they say stuff like, 'I should have been the one born to fight at such-and-such time," Others answer the call today. We have members who are serving in Iraq right now. If every man has that sense of being a warrior, it's a common ground, and that's why we go along with the lines of actual battle. We're not here just to shoot gixels on a screen-we're here for them. And so that's where we meet them, on that plain where their need is, of being that warrior."

Bullet-whipped air sears Carey's eyes as he fires, catching the Jerry-Captain420-full in the face and killing him instantly. As the match ends and the killboard flashes onscreen. Carey says. "Great game! For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. Captain420, if you died today, would you be saved?"

Matt Peckham

unruly players, our protocol is to remind them via text messaging of our standards. In addition, scripts are generally running, reminding players of our beliefs. We always stove to be positive and uplifting even in the face of extreme criticism."

A VIOLENCE THAT LIBERATES?

It's one thing to extend the idea of ministry by "virtualizing" it, but how you behave in a given medium-or more specifically, how the medium expects or ancourages you to behave-may be something else entirely. Posting in an online forum, for instance, is considerably different from chatting with friends in a first-person shooter: The former creates a static space, while the latter simulates a deadly combat zone where "kill or be killed" is the law of the land.

Consider Electronic Arts' popular modern military simulation Battlefield 2. Your goal in that game involves trading bullets, rockets, and kill counts with over 64 players online, often working in teams to assault defensive positions or lure unsuspecting players to an explosive, thunderous doom. Stell, several Christian clans online list the Battlefield series in their preferred-game lineups, is it a philosophical conflict of interest? Lyndon says not necessarily: "Many people seem to have this misconception that somehow Christian means nonviolent. Look at the stories in the Bible; they're some of the most violent and exciting epics ever written. Look at The Passion of the Christ, the most violent and most successful Christian movie of all time."

"What we object to is violence for the sake of violence," explains Lyndon, "games that contain gratuitous violence with no moral context. Aside from moral objections, we see gratuitous violence and gore as a crutch. Some developers hope that if they throw enough at the player, no one will notice poor gameplay." Describing his company's real-time strategy game Left Behind: Eternal Forces, Lyndon says that while it keeps the action in context, the

MEN OF GOD INTERNATIONAL

NO WEAPON FORMED AGAINST US SHALL PROSPER



NO WEAPON FORMED AGAINST US SHALL PROSPER

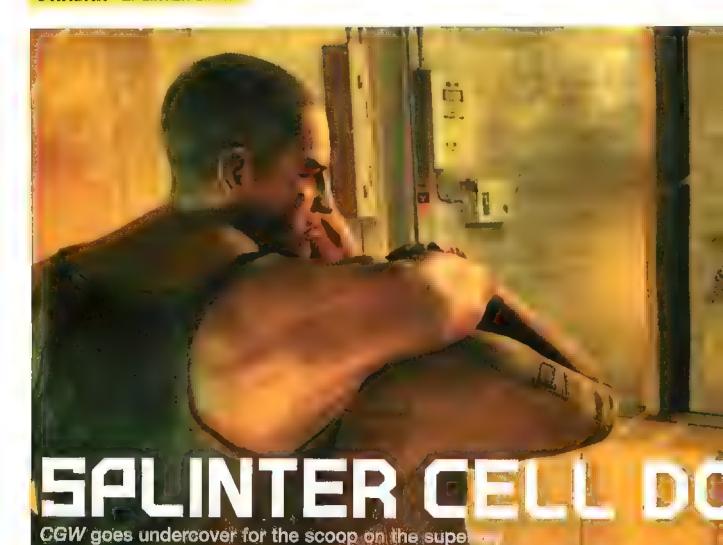
LIKE THE MILITARY GAMES IT calebrates with dedicated "portal" sites online Christian gaming organization Men of God International (www.menofgod.us) runs its member services rank and file. NCOs (that's "noncommissioned officer" for civvies) take a pledge, which includes the following: "Il am proud of the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the corps, Men of God International, and the word of God, which I represent in my Christian walk and mission to lead souls to salvation.

Member Owen Perker says the ranking

system is based on more than simply following military procedure, however. "We give rank based upon what an individual is adding to this organization and hence this ministry. but it's not always just merit," he notes. "Sometimes It's what a person can handle." Anybodý who wants to hop on board and get involved just has to say so. But to become an officer, you have to have a background. check. All officers do. The Department of Homeland Security monitors us, and that's to [police] possible sexual predators or offenders. While that hasn't been a problem here, it has been an addressed issue in the past. With that in mind, we have to be very diligent. MOG International is in the process of forming its nonprofit license, and to complete. that, we need to make sure we're following all applicable laws."

MOG International splits its ranking system into two primary groups: the "YC" or youth corps for members aged 13 to 17, and the "A" or adult group for those 12 and older. Each group performs different roles and has different responsibilities. In YC, as long as you're participating and active, you can pretty much get any position you apply. for," explains YC member Benjamin Smith. There's also a time limit. Let's say you're a recruit and just joined. You have 30 days: before you become a private, and you have 60 days before you become a private first class. We put restrictions on promotions to take things slow and make sure that we know. what we're getting into. And we have safeguards in place to make sure that we don't promote the wrong people."

Men of God international's ranking system runs the full range, from recruit-class. to site founder and General of the Army ((GOA), "The Lord's Soldier...[who] has final say in all decisions if he so wishes. All imembers of MOG will show the GOA all respect and honor due him as the founder of Men of God international as called by the Lord God Almighty.



PUBLISHER Ublant DEVELOPER Ublant RATING MICHAEL Action RELIA COAT March 2006

PREVIEW

SET THE FIRST-RATE SNEAKING aside for a second. Splinter Cell. Double Agent wants to push the emotional envelope, too. Here, a guy confronte his demons and deals with life-or-death decisions: while working as a double agent. These decisions not only add tension, but also push the game in different directions. Just not as different as promotional website bewaresamtisher: .com, which hints that our here has gone off the deep end, would have it. A wild crime: spree? An arrest and 11 consecutive life sentences? What the hell is going on here?

First, Sam Fisher is still working forthe NSA, this time—and the title says it all-as a double agent. Truth of the matter is, Splinter Cell's superspy suffered through a rough patch. His daughter was run down by a drunk driver, and he couldn't come to grips with the fact that he was on yet another covert op at the time, so he dropped out of active duty as a result. Now months later, he's Itching to get back in: the field. The only option available is going

under deep cover to inflitrate a domestic. terrorist threat.

The initial insertion requires you to serve time at Ellsworth Prison, and that means no gadgets, no guns, no trademark goggles. Befriend an imprisoned torrorist, effect a prison break, and infiltrate the criminal organization know as John Brown's Army (JBA).

Infiltrating JBA means going on operations with objectives exactly the opposite of the NSA's. In order to get deep inside the organization, you'll go places and do things that: the U.S. government wouldn't be too thrilled about. At times, this forces you to make inmission choices that will affect your standing with each organization and after the course of the game. For example, taking the terror route (performing hits, for example) to get inside distances you from the NSA, As Ubisoft rep Tyrone Miller puts It: "Replayability is a huge part of Double Agent. It's tough to break down all the branching story line points because they cross over each other, but there will be two or three alternate endings.

Between missions, at JBA headquarters, the tension really starts to ratchet up. These area

are more about interacting with characters than killing them. Learn the layout of the HQ. as you'll need to figure our how to eavesdrop on conversations, gather intel, and report back to the NSA without arousing any suspicion. Again, you're doing the majority of this without Som's trademark tools

So far, it all sounds an awful lot like the third season of Fox's action-drama television series but Miller insists Ublsoft isn't ripping off lack Bauer's adventures; "These are real tactics taught to real double agents."

Does Double Agent's huge emphasis on espionage over stealth mean you won't spends so much time skulking around in shadows? No, its gameplay is just more varied than you've seen in previous Splinter Cells. Instead of focusing on using the dark to sneak around, it's more about using the environment along with your wits to get from point to point. Early on, you're stuck in a full-scale prison riot. You'll see from 50 to 100 characters onscreen at once, all looking to escape or take guards. hostage. A later level takes place in broad daylight—during an African civil war, no less, Darren Gladstone



GOST MORTEM: SCORFION SLAYER

The greatest game never made



Lord Gaylan lives in a fancifully re-created Carpothian castle and insists people call him sir, but to the fans of his million-selling acorpion-slaying epic Scorpies Sizyer, he's simply the magic man. CGW BiackBerried his highness to suss out the art of his back-n-slash, and the deep metaphory and Freudian lok hiding behind all that bug killing./Shawa Ellett,



A Magic man Lord Caylen

INTERVIEW

CGW: So we start off battling brown scorpions, and that's brilliant. We get the +2 scorpion aplitter, and then it's stronger green scorpions, and so on. Any fears about introducing all these ideas at once, sir? Lord Caylen: Let me let you in on a little secret, and this is one of those looks behind the curtain that could weaken the magic, **a**o consider yourself warned. We got this guy perception psychologist, who came up with the idea of changing the colors of handher. and consoles—same machine, but people swear thay're all new. So you was where to went from there—the testers ano ried (the game] first felt like they were fighting the whole Monater Mahtial cover to cover. But, 16 be honest, we are saying stuff for the seque For instance, we're talking about having description scorpions drop, tressure....

GGW: What's we 65 with it?

LG: Well, that's the thing, and we're working It out still, but I will say it's the scorpions' gold and they won't like you taking it. Look, people. see bugs and think, "OK, lets squash 'em," but there's this whole literary tradition, too—Kafka, Angels & Insects, Starship Troopers—even Deadly Invasion: The Kiljer Bee Nightmare; il you were paying attention; was about the way folks take fear of illegal immigration too far, it's metaphor, it means something...

CGW: Leveling up is the wat, too....
LG: Right, the more powerful you be. the more powerful you be. the more powerful you be. the more powerful the way that the time you're taking home \$8 an induce Te. The and overty at with tribe banding sees you beck the tillfish base and director's communitary generation; general to their own conclusions about art. The sai't a book when in important part le buried in a single-passage or a wine where it flashes by in a few fram mean you're at this 30 maybe 40 hours—it voneveek, and it ought to stick. We worked this put now many acomplone we have to have you kill before it's practically impossible to not ge

Com How many was uner LOS Beyond in drget about it. You're still throng to figure out that the Think Before You Drink ABC Aftereor sol Special building you to think before you drink.

Carry An your yellow podons a jab in unoriginal game developers' elavish notion color choice?

LG: Again, we have a ware a person color and

perception psychologists, essentially making the game a seven-ligure mood ring...

CGW: The harrowing trek through Dargodil's den-metaphorical rebirth of the hero? LG: Sometimes a damp cave is just a: damp cave...

CGW: Were you worried that the scorpion boss would blow our minds in a bad way? We knew it was building to something big, but not that big. And then, hitting all those other scorpions anywhere hurt 'em, and it turns out, this one has only one weak spot..... LG: At first we had his head flash, but some folks couldn't make the connection, so we added the part that's in there now where he says [in scorpion voice] "Skt, you'll never, ever hit my lead, skti" and they figured that out. I see walkthroughs on tip sites, but we'd rather you worked it out yourself.

CGW: Would you say it's because the world you've created is so complex that some bozus have started having "sex" in it, instead of doing what they're supposed to? LG: work I want to say that my work is for everyone, but how likely is that? This particular process. In process, income, it blame on the publisher. You! we seem the box, and it's not what the game is about linese Fablo types don't say "scorpion slayer" or "I slay scorpions." And he has no armor, why? We know he's strong because he slays ecorplors, not because he has no shirt. Flowing nair, time. But it shouldn't be conditioned like a Chippendale's. Something also I see: it says "actitable vernin-killing roller coaster" but there land a roller coaliter in the thing. At all, /



"FLOWING HAIR FINE BUT IT SHOULDN'T BE CONDITIONED LIKE A CHIPPENDALE'S."

-LEAD DESIGNER LORS FRYLEN

STARCRAFTERS

Is the classic RTS ready for a comeback?

BASE CAME WarCraft III DEVELOPER Team Revolution GENEE RTS WEBSITE revolution, we3esmpaigns.com RELEASE DATE When it's done.

HOD

IT'S BEEN IN RELATIVELY HUSHED development for almost four years, but a new take on the StarCraft universe is getting closer to completion. No, Blizzard isn't announcing a new game, so calm down. Project Revolution (revolution.wc3campalgns.com) is a mod team's attempt to re-create the original StarCraft's multiplayer experience using the WarCraft III engine—same units, same maps, brandnew coat of 3D paint.

Our first follow-up question for project lead Scott "Skizot Enigma" Deason (who we first approached about his unsanctioned update to the sci-fi RTS in CGW #247) is if he's been served a cease-and-desist letter yet, "We've sent off several snail mail messages to Blizzard, but we haven't heard back from them. Unofficially, we do know they know about us. We are working to get into their mod site program and really hope to get accepted."

Project Revolution has made a lot of progress in the past year, but much of it isn't visible to the naked eye. "We ran across a few major errors with WC3 that hindered our progress," Deason says, "so we had to code around them." One "small" bug is that some of the A.I.-controlled units were not moving and became sitting ducks. Despite coding snafus like this that need addressing, Deason says the crew is making progress in capturing the original feel of StarCraft: "Let's just say that I'm more than 10 percent done, but less than 100 percent."

The problem: The project currently

consists of only 15 members-all of them scattered around the globe. They don't plan to recruit more people, and the Revolution posse isn't exactly getting paid for its work. They're building this labor of love in their spare time, and, with holidays, final exams, family Issues, and, well, life getting in the way, development is bound to drag. Even Deason, whose 9-to-5 gig is in IT, will soon need some downtime. He's expecting a young zergling of his own soon. So, what is the crew hoping to get from its work at this point? Fame? Money? A Job at Blizzard? "Honestly," Deason says, "we just want to fmish it." Darren Gladstone



Zorgs and humans go head-to-head.





"LET'S JUST SAY THAT I'M MORE THAN IO PERCENT DONE BUT LESS THAN IOO PERCENT." —SCOTT DEASON

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...to lush, mythical vistas.

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Titan Quest takes hack-n-slash junkies on a mythical tour

PUBLISHER THE JEVELOPER Iron Lore GENET Action-RPG SPIEASE DATE Spring 2006

EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

DIABLO HANGERS-ON NEED TO FACE facts: A third installment in the seminal hack-n-stash series is nowhere in sight, and with a four-years-and-counting gap since the last sequel, it's time to move on. Little compares, we know. However, taking action-RPG aficionados back to ye olde days of magic and mythology, Iron Lore Entertainment's Titan Quest could provide the perfect fix.

Greece, Egypt, Babylon-all present and accounted for. Our contacts at Iron Lore remain silent as aphinxes about story specifics but promise a plotline that touches on each of these mythical eras and more. Like Gilgamesh of legend, you'll tackle life-changing challenges...that is, after crafting a custom character by way of six

mixable, matchable skill masteries that combine to create spell-casting warriors, stealthy magic-users, and other unique combos that smash the static class-based mold. Cyclopes, harples, centaurs, and other fabled beasties are fodder for your bloodlust...and unlike the myriad scorpions and spiders from other action-RPGs-who inexplicably drop piles of gold and loot from their bottomless bug pockets-what you see here is what you get. See a centurion sporting a killer suit of armor? Knock him down and nab it. Like Medusa's shiny sword? Pry it from her stone-cold body. The staff of Ra? Yeah, good luck with that one.

Plus, if you don't fancy fighting Zeus or Anubis, Titan Quest offers a custom set of user-friendly world-crafting tools that put the creative power in your hands.

Ryan Scott







LIKE GILGAMESH OF LEGEND. YOU'LL TACKLE LIFE-CHANGING CHALLENGES.









CREATING WORLDS

ATTENTION, DIGITAL ARCHITECTS: TITAN QUEST'S BUILT-IN world editor gives you all the necessary tools to bring your wown fantasy world to life. It doesn't require a CAD drafting degree to operate, either: TQ/s world editor might be one of the most intuitive tools of its type, allowing users to mold and paint large, complex, detail-rich landscapes in a matter of minutes. Check: out this step-by-step example—barren wasteland to luxurious riverside crossing in 15 minutes or less!

Start things off with a basic, barren world template waiting to be terra-p formed to your every whim.

Next, shape the terrain a little more making it a bit more realistic-looking and carving a path for a river to flow through later on, it's still pretty bland, so add some color to it.

Now, apply some rack and grassland soenery. Don't mistake thesis for boring, repetitive textures, though—the terrain mapping blends together very naturally, making for more dynamic-looking worlds than most modmakers may be used to.,

Trees come next. Notice the shadowing. Screenshots don't really convey it-or, for that matter, the

extremely smooth animation of trees swaying in the wind-but trust us: (t rlooks great.

In goas the river, Which automatically flaws around terrain and intelligently calculates much of its own direc-

tion. Lay a bridge for characters to cross and a cobblestone path slightly overgrown, with moss

Finally, set up an NPC shop in a nearby tent, and blast a cave entrance in the wall. Who knowsthis might eventually lead to some sort. of nefarious dungeon complex. See?



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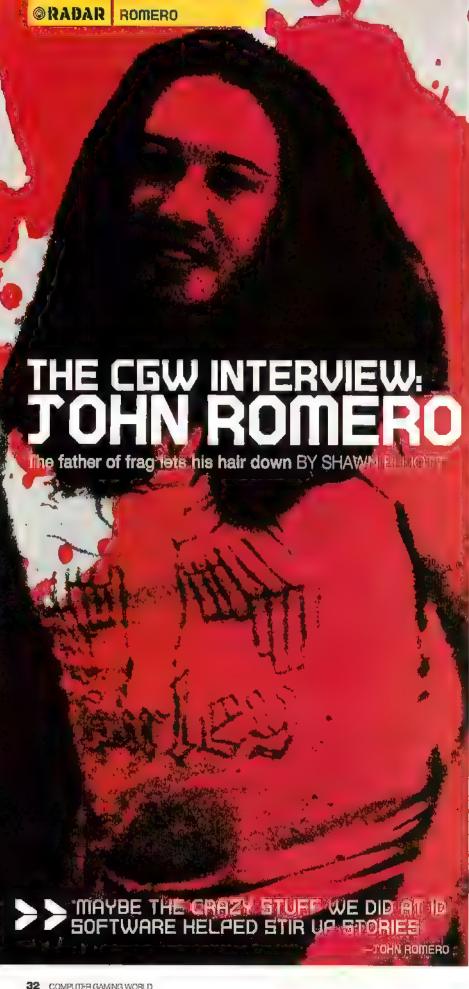
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THROUGH THE YEARS

1984: At age 17, gets first game, Scout Search (in which you play as a scoutmaster trying to rescue Gub Scoute from a killer grizzly bear), published in inCider, an Apple il magazine

1991: Colounds id Software with John Carmack, Adrian Carmack, and Tom Hall Involved in the creation of Commander Keen Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, Doom II, and Quake

1997: Cofounds Ion Storm with id coworker Tom Hall. Announces Daikatana, to be published that Christmas, but it's not completed until 2000.

2001: Ion Storm closes, Cofounds Monkeystone Games with Tom Hall, Stevie Case, and Brian Moon, with a focus on mobile gaming.

2003: Leaves Monkeystone and joins! Midway Games as project lead on Gaundel Seven Sorrows, but leaves months before the game's completion...

2005; Opens a new development studio and begins work on a yet-to-be-named PC MMO "for a new type of audience."

INTERVIEW .

CGW: What do the media cite as your chief contribution to the industry? What would you say it's been?

John Romero: Cocreator of the first-person. shooter? Designer of Doom, Myself, I [might] add pioneering deathmatch and the rise of e-sports The o sports connection an't as well documented, but I was talking about deathmatch as a sport back in '95. We even discussed creating official leagues well before people started using the word "clan" and forming their own groups

I do think it's important to reiterate that I believe that design is law, despite the Animal House-like antics at Ion Storm long ago. Tomfoolery and shenanigans (happened) back then, but the good that came out of it was a lesson to other developers: Don't do that. Don't let your marketing department put words in your mouth that you wouldn't say, especially if it has anything to do with making the entire audience "your brich "

CGW: The industry's officially mainstream now. As one of gaming's first rock star figures, were you ahead of your time?

JR: Actually, I'd have to say that the legendary and venerable Bill Budge was the first rock star game designer, minus the long hair. Really, most of the designers in the first EA ad were considered a supergroup back then. In the early '80s, most programmers had their names on the front of the box. and you could shop for games by author much like we do with books nowadays. I think maybe I was just popular at the right time when people were ready to put a face to a popular game

But I have to say it's a mixed blessing being well-known. You have people who love you and

people who hate you. Everyone makes mistakes, and for someone who's been making games since he was 11 years old, I've made quite a few mistakes. Still, anyone who tries to achieve something...has to go through that. I seem to go through it more often because I'm always trying something new and different. A few years ago it was mobile gaming, then it was reinventing a franchise and doing a purely console game, and now it's creating a brand-new type of MMO for a different audience.

CGW: Has the cult of personality surrounding you ever overshadowed your accomplishments, or has one helped the other? Have you helped cultivate it?

JR: From the amount of fan mail and reactions that I get when I meet people, I don't think it's overshadowed my accomplishments. The book Masters of Doom helps to dispel some of the mystery and clears up some misinformation. And I don't think I've helped cultivate it other than giving interviews whenever a magazine wanted one. Maybe the crazy stuff we did at id Software helped stir up stories-chopping a door down with an ax, throwing adapter cards like shuriken, blasting our game-playing table into pieces, trashing a microwave, blowing a hole in the wall after losing a foosball match-the list goes on. Yeah, I'm excitable, so maybe that adds to the

I was talking to someone the other day-someone who followed al. the stories but didn't know the truth-about Ion Storin's extravagant office and the stories around it, and when I told him why the office was so nice he was shocked. Simply put, Eidos wanted it that way for press parties, interviews, and whatnot. They had to approve all of lon's expenditures—people forget that it was their money.

CGW: So stakes are getting higher and greater numbers of people are now involved in any given game. Publishers spend millions on something, and that raises the tension. Are the big names having a harder time generating and seeing through fresh and individual ideas? Are mod teams the new source for outrageous variety?

JR: Big publishers are always interested in game design that is proven to generate sales, and any innovation or design evolution has to take place around that core. This is typically how most sequels are designed. Traditional game development investment by publishers is typically 80 percent safe, proven designs and 20 percent speculative ones that might create a new franchise. Mod leams are the new indies-they have nothing to lose and (development is free).

CGW: So, is it in davelopers' interest to make easily modified engines?

JR: I would have to say yes. But just because an engine can be modified does not mean that it should have security holes-the two are not related. Witness World of WarCraft, a game that simply must have anticheating security, but also has tons of add-on modules to extend the interface. An easily modifiable engine makes it easy to extend the game, which keeps people interested in the game longer

CGW: Say you're positive a publisher won't support an idea of yours. Would you consider giving it to a modder if only to get it out there, maybe to make the point that it's something people want to play?

JR: No, I would most likely start developing it myself at home.

CGW: Is there a market for noncompetitive first-person software? We're thinking of the popularity of Source-based building sim Garry's Mod and of the people who use Battlefield 2 as a stunt park.

JR: Sure there is.

CGW: Why aren't we seeing stuff like it on store shelves?

JR: Probably because most designers aren't actually trying to design nonviolent first-person games. It takes more imagination to come up with compeling gameplay that makes use of that viewpoint.

CGW: What else, aside from shooting, is the first-person perspective suited for?

JR: Sheer brutal violence involving blunt objects. It's so easy to click a mouse to pull the trigger-how about working on [someone] for a white of underestimating the audience's intelligence?

JR: There's room for completely transparent interfaces and heavily context-driven design like Resident Evil 4's



[GameCube and PS2], in Half-Life 2, you walk up to a window, break it, jump up on the windowsill, crouch down, and squeeze through onto a second-story roof. When you walk up to a window in RE4, the screen has a big "A to Jump" on it. You press A and it shows a cool one-second cinematic of your character blasting through the window, [sending] shards of glass everywhere. Each game gives players a different payoff because of the design paradigm it uses. RE4's paradigm is perfect for a controller-based interface.

But with HL2, assuming we're intelligent was a big win [for developer Valve]. And the way other characters treat you like a superhero was a great decision. Some players feel flattered, Anyone who hasn't played the first Half-Life feels like they have a reputation to live up to and probably makes a mental note to play the original sometime to see what they did to deserve that kind of treatment.

CQW: It seems that shooter fans come in two



"MOD TEAMS ARE THE NEW INDIES-THEY HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE AND IDEVELOP-MENT IS FREEL"

-JOHN ROMERO

with a pipe? And I mean more than the Hall-Life crowbar; I'm talking about deciding where on his body you want to do some damage, and putting your back into that swing and having that body part affected. In multiplayer, if you're at the top of a ramp and get smashed in the back of the head, your view should be tumbling forward and upside down-I don't think I've seen that yet.

CGW: Monolith's Condemned?

JR: I haven't kept up on every shooter out there-I'm sort of stuck in World of WarCraft and don't want to leave. Now, if you're wondering if there's something else, other than bone-crushing violence, that the FPS is capable of on more of a design level, I'm still waiting for that moment where i'm walking through a dark forest at night. and when I look at a cave entrance I see two red eyes and hear a growt. What I'm talking about are visual triggers...as opposed to physical triggers, which is what we've been using all along.

CGW: What else would visual triggers allow you to do?

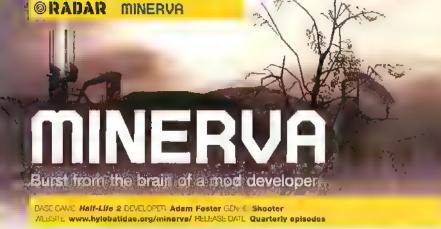
JR: You could reward the player for investigat ing everything. For example, in a hypothetical Nintendo game, maybe (you) took up at the starry sky, and when one particular star is in the center region it flashes slightly. If you zoom in on it with binoculars, it smiles and gives you something special. That's different than a physical trigger because you can do this anywhere outside and only at moht.

CGW: About that sort of transparent interface and interaction.... More and more, games crack their own challenges. They're accessible to the average Joe, but are their developers in danger flavors; the casual sort and the clan kind. Now, on the console side, some games pair players of similar skill level, but what about other, more organic solutions? Say a game was designed to put the diehards on one team with a tactical advantage and the dabblers on another with numerical superiority....

JR: Sure, you could do that. But most of the time. truly skilled players avoid the arenas where n00bs play. And since n00bs are intimidated by the advanced gameplay in those arenas, they naturally separate themselves. Plus, there's plenty of time for a new player to practice on bots and come back to see how they measure up. What I'm saying is that I believe in a separation of skills where the n00b gets more of a payoff when his or her skill increases and he or she can beat a tougher rival. That's much more satisfying than being a n00b on a team of n00bs and not apprecialing the veteran player's abilitles because you've been given a boost. I'm a huge proponent of e-sports and believe in skill payoff.

COW: We're not sure we're seeing players sorting themselves by skill level. We see one or two savants in every other server who, depending on the title, own the match to the detriment of everyone else's enjoyment. How do novices and even midlevel players know where to go to get into games with players at comparable skill levels?

JR: Lagree. Some sort of ranking system needs to be built along with rank ranges on servers. PC FPS makers are probably not adding all the code that goes along with matchmaking and ranking because of the time investment and the fact that the PC market is nowhere near [what the] console market is. The investment isn't worth it. /



PREVIEW

A MYSTERY FIGURE WITH DICEY motives. A hero who doesn't know who he is. Sound familiar? Adam Foster's episodic mod Minerva parallels Half-Life 2's themes and is set shortly before the blockbuster, but it features neither the G-Man nor Gordon Freeman, Instead, it's an apocryphal addition in the vein of previous expansion packs (e.g., Opposing Forces), only further from the main event.

"Half-Life's subtle manner of storytelling makes it safe to add things to its universe," Foster says, "And since Minerva is set shortly before Half-Life 2 itself, there's no need to tie in directly to that game's events. It's the universe, rather than the plot, that I'm borrowing-spending hours explaining why a particular crate was in a particular location in HL2 doesn't interest me, to be honest."

'Metastasis 1," Minerva's first episode (find it on CGW's December DVD and at www.hylobatidae.org/minerva/), nails it on a number of levels. Its original soundtrack, scored by Joseph Toscano, perfectly complements HL2's moody music, and its rearranged art assets create a Combinecontrolled island outpost that fits the mold without being familiar to the point of "been there, done that" redundancy. Plus, Foster intends to develop its less-linear level design in forthcoming installments.

(Expect to see the second episode around the time you read this.)

"You can have a happy medium between linearity and all-out [open-endedness] in story-driven FPS map design," he explains. "In actuality, 'Metastasis 1' is almost as linear as Half-Life 2. Maybe it's more carefully hidden-you've still got to get to A to get to B, but I'll let the player catch a glimpse of point C along the way. I generally build worlds by working out a semirealistic location first and then wrapping gameplay around it, which helps me get away from the sprawling, nonsensical meandering that's present in far too many FPSes."

As for Minerva's central mystery-who or what is its off-site, string-pulling agent, and what's her agenda?—Foster says more hints are on the way: "Major plot revelations hidden in plain sight; a continuing exploration of the Combine's subjugation of Earth along with an introduction to human rebels; offshore facilities, a river, a city, and perhaps even a Combine citadel; then distant, never-before-seen locations that may prove less surprising to those paying close attention to Minerva. But remember: One minor impediment to the player's understanding of the truth is that Minerva is a pathological, egotistical liar, prone to wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. She's got her own reasons for what she's doing, and she isn't necessarily acting in our best interests." Shawn Elliott



Area shifty one: Expect spooky Stalkers.



Try chapter one on CGW's December DVD.



"IMINERVA HAS] HER OWN REASONS FOR WHAT SHE'S DOING AND SHE ISN'T NECESSAR-ILY ACTING IN OUR INTERESTS." -ADAM FOSTER

THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY FEBRUARY 2006:



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MONEY MIGHT NOT BUY 19-YEARold World of WarCraft lotherio Ben
"Jammno" love, but in-game gold is
another story. Fact of the matter is that while
Ben lancies himself a gaming god, he has no
game. Determined to do somothing about it,
he started a thread in WOW's official forums,
offering gold for any and all dating advice
leading to actual love.

The best advice I've gotten so far," Ben says, "has been from a fellow who gave me a fink to this website about male mating rituals (www.outpostnine.com/editorials/mating3.htm). I ended up giving him 2,800 gold.

He didn't ask for any, but I gave it to him. A lot of people were like that—they wouldn't take the loot, even when I opened the trade window, plopped it down, and hit Accept. I paid others with Diablo II items, U.S. dollars, and my Gaming God shirt. (It's OK; I own more than one.)"

Still, Ben says, "I haven't had to pay very many people, as most of their 'advice' was a crummy attempt to get free gold." Either that, or flat-out facetious, as was the case when one cutup slyly suggested, 'Give it all to an [overseas] female MMO farmer so she can buy a ticket to America and marry you."

Ben repaid "the worst advice with a WarCraft III 'loss' account that had over 1,500 recorded defeats."

Although Ben has yet to meet his soul mate, he says he has learned a surprising leason: Ugly-on-the-outside Horde players "are nicer than people in the Alilance. For one, the Alliance player base is younger—loads of 8- to 12-year-olds. Then, Horde condone free speech, where on the Alilance side, soccer moms, children, and other closed-minded types control chat. As for why most children play on Alliance, I believe it's because they'd rather not roleplay as the 'ugly monsters' or something."

IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

TACTIC "THE DIRTY DWARF" GEDRAN knows not to come knocking when the van's rocking, but no one warned him about World of WarCraft's role-playing servers (spaces where in-game make-believe bumps and grinds with good sense, and players pretend that they're fruity fantasy figures as opposed to the people who play them on PCs).

"Exploring the Deeprun Tram, I trokked and trokked and found something rather-unusual," Tactic says. "What was this? Two naked night elves. Now, being from a PVP realm, I don't.

really see naked characters bent in front of each other in the middle of nowhere."

As he approached, he heard, or, rather, saw splashed scross the screen, "Artemise growns softly, biting you, her breath hard against your neck," as well as other things too tender and unfit for print. Tactic says he couldn't help but laugh a little. "Had they seen me approach? watched intently, intrigued by this fantastic role-playing experience. I felt it was my duty to perpetuate the general merriment of all... So I gathered my composure and engaged in my own theatrics."



NO ONE
WARNED HIM
ABOUT WORLD OF
WARCRAFT'S ROLEPLAYING SERVERS

Gedran reveals his head from the shadows and begins to unzip his pantaloons.

Gedran removes his Dwarven Hand Cannon and begins to stroke the barrel everso slowly.

so slowly.
Gedran lets out a quiet casp as the cannon begins to expand in his hand.
Artemisa growls menacingly at you.
Inotep growls "... You need to leave..."

"Uneuccessful, I figured, what the helf? I might as well start a dwarven sendwich while the getting w≥s good."

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A CONSUMER'S REPORT

A CERTAIN SENIOR EDITOR WHO SHALL remain nameless recently had a run-in with customer support. One bug-riddled PC and one frustrating marathon phone call session later, he asked, "What the hell is wrong with people!?" and broke his mouse. This got us wondering who is reading the fine print. Posing as computer buyers, we called some vendors asking general questions about build. times and oustomer support.

While we'd like to complain about one company's surprisingly hostile sales/customer support team, we can't. It's just one person at a switchboard, not the whole company. Still, one very sound piece of advice is to check out the Better Business Bureau (www. bbb.org) and see if a company you're dealing with is on the level./ Darren Gladstone-

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RED ORCHESTRA: **05TFRONT 41-45**

Louder than bombs

PUBUSHER, Steam DEVELOPER, Tripwire Interactive GENRE, Shooter RELEASE DATE, January 2006

PREVIEW

TRIPWIRE INTERACTIVE IS TAKING the engine-licensing rights it earned after cleaning up in Epic's '04 Make Something Unreal contest for best UT2004-based mod and going commercial via Steam with its award-winning Russo-German WWII shooter Red Orchestra, Ostfront 41-45.

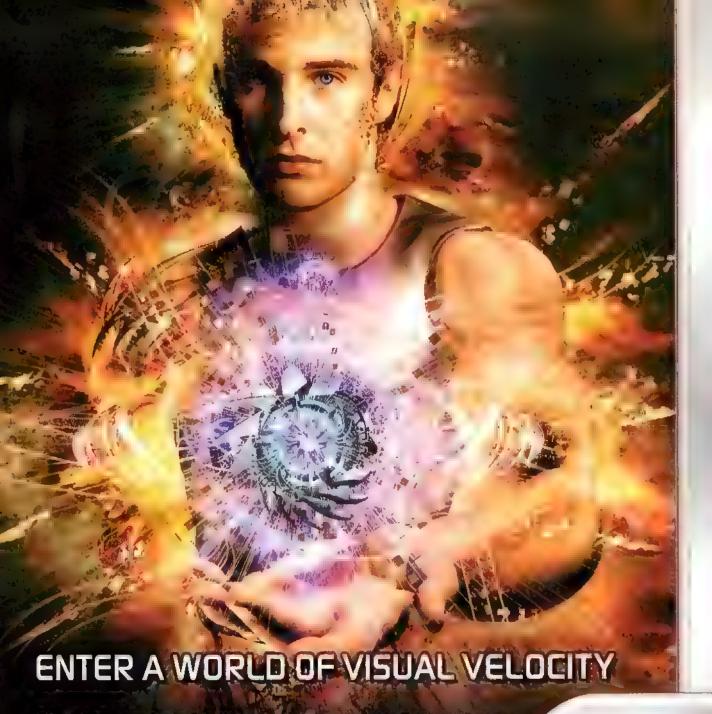
Between Call of Duty and Battlefield 1942. we've fought on the side of the big moustache (Joe) to defeat the little mustache (Adolf) before, but Alan Wilson, VP of Tripwire, says the developer's shooter is "more of a simulation-with weapons and vehicles as true to life as possible. Although, true to life also means something should be simple to use." Case in point: Soldiers can now rest rifles and submachina guns on ledges, sandbags, and anything lying around, or lean against walls to reduce

recoil. Other additions to RO (and the genre) include crouched sprinting and the ability to dive over obstacles and out windows.

While Stalin's organs—the tube-launched Katyushas, whose shrieking rockets were the last thing retreating Germans wanted to heararen't playing in Orchestra, tanks are, and here again, Tripwire's attention to accessible realism is unrivaled, modeling true-to-life tank intenors, from crew positions to the commander's cupola, à la the cockpits in full-blown flight sims. And where one man can almost manage a vehicle, he's certainly slower, switching from seat to seat to operate its various systems. "Fully crewed armor is always more effective," Wilson says, "and the whole business of encouraging teamwork runs right through the entire game, down to machine gunners needing people to pass them extra ammo."

Shawn Elliott





This is it. The new Radeon® X1800 series hands you the visual and performance possibilities you only dreamed of from a PC graphics processor. It has been designed with a radically new ultra-threaded core 3D architecture and with Shader Model 3.0, unleashing the most mind-blowing gaming effects. What's more, the X1800 introduces ATI's revolutionary Avivo", our new reference for video and display perfection.

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drunk dial an ex-girifriend. That's what's so great about a Reverse button in gaming. Prince of Persia just resets the clock for you to screw up a jump again. TimeShift keeps you where you are white everything else goes backward.

PREVIEW

You know the first-personshooter science: Stuff gets shot to s***. Each new game trumps the last with card-crushing graphics and improved intelligence, but how many offer truly unique means to negotiate tricky spots? Enter Saber

Interactive's TimeShift, an FPS ahead of its time. Sort of.

It's 2007, but the future's a little retro. Folks drive steam-powered lorries; machine guns look more machine than gun. Someone's zapped back in time and mucked up the past, and, as a result, history—and technology with it—has progressed in some.

"wonky ways.

The game's real innovation is time control that goes beyond the platforming mulligan button found in recent Prince of Persias. We want more. So does TimeShift producer Kyle Peschel, who walks us filrough his game's time-bending tactics here. / Darren Gladstone





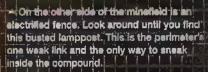


See this grassy courtyard? Looks peace-ful enough—except for the warning sign that says you're about to walk into a minefield. Ah, that's probably just to keep out the tourists. Let's walk ahead,

Maybe not. The trop mines literally lead out of the ground and explode when you cross over them. How's about we try slowing things down a little after reloading the game?

Hit slow, then run through the minefield. By the time the frog mines jump up into the air to explode, you're long gone. This also cre-ates a great distraction. Alerted guards head toward the noise, not you.







 What part of "electrified fence" did you not: get? Climbing a metal girder len't particularly bright. So, how do you stop from becoming a Kentucky fried time-traveler?



 Hit Stop. If the electrons can't move; you can't get shocked. You've got only five seconds, so sprint over the girder and get going. The Stop button is equally handy in firefights—freeze someone and steal his weapon.



Just past the fence, you're in range of your target: the zeppelin factory. Seems like a quick stroll across some train tracks-hop on the back of the zeppelin express and you're ready for the next big fight.



Not so fast, Sparky. The train must go through a massive gas chamber before continuing into the factory. Simply stopping time and hopping on board wouldn't help you here. Reload and try it again.



 Reverse time wills you're in the gas chamber. Another train that just left is rolling backward into the chamber. Hop on board and let time go back to normal. You're on your way out

DETON

Senior editor Darren Gladstone's monthly rant



THE XBOX 360 SHOWS UP AT THE office, so what's first? Perhaps a few laps in Project Gotham Racing 3?

Screw that! This nerd has other plans for his new milky white techno-lust toy du jour.

What can you do with the 360? Well, let's see. Shop for different wallpapers at the Xbox Live Marketplace, Yawn, Read music and JPG files straight off an iPod or digicam. Zzzz. Use it as a progressive scan DVD player. Hmm. Maybe. Wait a sec...I can plug this into my home network and stream media throughout the house over a broadband connection? Here's how much of a dork I am: This is what gets me excited. I can turn my PC into a central media server-stockpiling all my music and video into one location. Does this mean it's time to chuck out the TIVo and DVD player?

Got Windows XP...?

First, the bad news: no video streaming for you. Even with a TV tuner card, you'd still need to sneak over to newegg.com and buy an OEM version of the Media Center OS. And, according to Microsoft, even after doing this, there's still no guarantee it'll work on your machine. The only other option is to wait for Windows Vista, which will apparently have Media Centerlike functionality built in. Great. What can you do until late 2006? Look at pictures and listen to music.

It may not sound like much, but it's still pretty cool and easy to set up. After a quick download from xbox.com/pcsetup, you can locate and stream tunes from your PC to the Xbox 360. Oh, and tech-ready stoners are already lighting up the music visualization program, which is basically the equivalent of a user-controlled Pink Floyd laser light show. Minus the smokes.

Got Windows Media Center...?

The notion behind a Media Center PC is simple: One box to rule them all, in this case It's a Dell XPS 600, which comes with Media Center OS installed, packs an arseload of power (Dual 7800 GTX cards are nice, but would it kill Dell to include an Athlon CPU?), and-most important for any home-theater enthusiast-runs slient. It's so quiet that the Xbox 360 is actually louder than the computer. No loke.

Again, after a quick download from xbox.com, It's easy to get music blasting in short order. Video, though-that's a whole other ball o' wax, in fact, this introduces a whole other world of issues. as I quickly discovered with the Media Center Extender Network Performance Tuner. Accept that you're only going to get an HD-quality picture through a wired network. Try getting fancy (i.e., going wireless), and you've got to set your expectations lower. Like I did. Walt, that didn't come out right.

D-Link's DI-784 wireless router is easy to set up (the 24/7

tech support didn't hurt, either) and it promises speeds of up to 108Mbps. What makes the DI-784 good for gaming and video is that it sends out both 802.11a and 802.11g signals. Now, it's playtime. As the PC recorded the latest episode of Elimidate (yeah, we're all class here), I started flipping the channels on the PC. Meanwhile, on the bigscreen TV, I used my Xbox 360's connection to the Media Center PC to channel surf and play back pre-recorded shows. Hiccup-free, Microsoft shut me up. Solld performance, decent picture qualityover a wireless network transmission, no less-and it was easy to control. I gotta say, pretty impressive. Now, if only there were more 360 games I'd actually want

to play. Darren Gladstone Got a bone to pick with

Gladstone? E-mail him at Darren_Gladstone@ ziffdevis.com,

- aziness rewarded Hold down the Guide button on the controller for a few seconds and the Xbox 360 powers up. Hold that button down again and you can turn off the console or the controller.
- V Keyboard crazy. Tired of using a gamepad to slowly enter text? Plug in a USB keyboard and it'll work. Now, if only there were a driver for it to work with mice as well. Just Imagine—keyboard/ mouse gaming on the big screen.
- Hot damni There are lots of reports of overheating. I haven't had any issues. but I know better than to cover up the air holes or put it in a tight enclosure
- Progressive, The 360 actually delivers a decent picture, though videophiles will spot the "meh"-caliber black levels.

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Much of Dreamfall's allure lies in its hybrid-zed environments, full of steampunky centrap liess and science-magic eseterics.



irtually invistale interfac-kness and buttons—foc

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

End of the longest hiatus?

SHED Apply DEVELOPER Fundom GENRE Adventure RELEASE DATE SHOULD DO

EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

PANTIES AND PLUCK, INGENUITY and...dogit say luck--Funcom's sequel to 2000's celebrated adventure game The Longest Journey (with its infamous nightgown dream/nightmare opener) plans to once more petition smarts and savvy, though reflexgrinding twitch play matters, too.

What happened to dimension shifter April Ryan at The Longest Journey's close? Dreamfall has enswers all around, hoisting their nerrative a decade later and shoeing you as protagonist Zoë Castillo, another comely lass. whose once ordinary life goes topsy-turvy with: Hof yore? Check Dreamfall's new "focus" feaconspiracies, ghostly beings, and a sinister; clash between science and magic, Spanning three worlds, Zoë's equally "longest" journey flings her from a futuristic Casablanca to strange sea cities, subterranean caverns, and many dark or divine locales beyond.

Funcom product director Jorgan Tharaldsen says the poke, prod, and puzzle method still comprises Dreamfall's core, "It

has the classic adventure-game elements at heart (etory, exploration, exciting characters, puzzies), but also extensive influence from action-adventure games (stealth, combata action-related quests). The combat system is similar to the combat found in [console fighter] Dead or Alive, where you have one button for hard attacks, one button for light attacks and one button for blocking." Sneak, punch, or jaw your way through sticky situations; Funcom aims to lure a broader crowd by toffering brute or brainy solutions to puzzles and confrontations.

Hate the pixel-prowling in adventure games. ture. Instead of tediously trawling your mouse for fussy hot spots or running up to distant objects for info, probing works in first person. letting you summon information or interact with the world based on what you can see.

"[The focus feature] is easy to use and context sensitive," says Tharaldsen, "meaning you canscan your entire visible environment through the eyes of the characters, use it to get information on distant objects, and trigger remoteopportunities, like throwing a rock or listening) in on conversations from far away."

DREAMFALL RADAR®

While the new action elements may balt combat fans, Theraldsen says atory and art are still king. "The art direction is fantastic." just the immense variety you get throughout the game. Dreamfall has so many amazing. locations, so many twists and turns in the gameplay and story, you never know what to expect next." With its sublime-looking interface and uncommonly eclectic story to match (coscribed by TLJ's writer-director Ragnar Ternquist and newbie Dag Schieve), Dreamfallis the adventure game to watch for in 2006. Matt Peckham



SNEAK, PUNCH, OR TAW YOUR WAY THROUGH STICKY SITUATIONS.

AUTO AFFAULT WE WINTER NECOTE DE A CIPER NOIDEVIL SENSE MMORPQ FOR SELAN Spring 2008. Get dented

EXCLUSIVE NEW INFO

YOU'VE HEARD OF AUTO ASSAULT right? The MMO where you're a car? Yesh, that's what we thought, too, it's been nearly half a year since we played a demo of NCsoft's MMOcaRPG, so our recent playtime with the beta and face time with: Scott Brown president of developer NetDevil drove home (sorry) how little we really knew. about the game and how the last few months of changes—some minor, some major—have altered Auto Assault's landscape /Kristen Salvatore

What we thought Auto Assault's major midbeta changes reliected problems with the product-and harbored the possibility that it wouldli never be released.

Why we were wrong: That's a much more glass-half-smpty approach than that of the NetDevil team, which fully reconfigured in order to religger the game. Says Brown: "We had the extended beta functioning the way we wanted it to, but we decided it just wasn't good enough yet. We saw two main problems. One, it was too hard to get into the game—moving and shooting simultaneously is new to a lot of MMO plevers and some people were spending hours in the

tutorials. Now, tutorials are just five to 10 minutes long-we give you your own place to get used to: the game quickly, and then you go to minihighways populated by other noobs." ->

The other problem? "It was too repetitive. Once you were past the learning part, you found an bunch of different levels, but they were too similar to one another." To tackle this, the dev team reconfigured into three "strike teams" operating under three lead designers. They broke the game into pieces, and each team was tasked with making its section look "really cool and unique Brown says, "Each team lead explained, 'Here is what the player is supposed to "get" from this area—what goal, what story elements, etc. Now make it happen." The result? Much more diversity from area to area, right down to the way weather affects the game's fully destructible environment, which could take a beating from, say, constant lightning and rain in some areas. "How ithe weather] acts in each section was up to the section's team—there's no universal rule about how it works," Brown says.

White I was not Your "champter" is a car. Auto Assault la no Herble the Love Bug-R's an action-RPG with characters using care as their primary weepons. "Basically, if you can fight, you're in a car explains Brown. "If not:—when you're in a town for example, where you pick up instanced mis-sions, buy/trade/eeli items, and visit the body shop to customize your ride—"you're on foot."

reflected in everything from the look of your race's towns to the tone of your story's writing-these characters are so unique, says Brown, that "playing a different race feels like playing a: different game."

in many ways, Auto Assault has all the typis cal trappings of an RPG, "a story and character development and attributes and dice rolls—al the things we love in an RPG," enthuses Brown Changes to the initial beta reflect that, so then are now much deeper physical character-customization options and a more profound development of each race's story, "so there's a reason to). choose one over another, and there's increased ownership in the character," explains Brown, Yourexploits further your character's story, which is part of a larger tale about the war between the races and their struggles to dominate the world's various lands, waged via the kick-eas vehicles:

that serve as their main weapons.

Auto Asseut incorporates a lot of what we love in a shooter as well—it's just that here, instead of holding your weapon, you ride around in it and In other games, maybe the green armor is the strongest, so everyone is running around with the green armor," Here, two vehicles with identical ettributes may look totally different. You choose a chasels and name for your car at the same time ours creating a character, and over time you

0 15 011, 1100 1 1 5 (1) The state of the s



▲ Auto Assault's three races: mutants...



...blomeks...



...humans, Can't we all just get along? Noti-

explains. "For example, you can find some carbon fiber in the world, bring it to the body shop, and put it on your car." Weapons upgrades include "drops," like oil sticks or grenades, and. attachable weapons like flamethrowers, with damage types including fire, explosive, physical, electrical, and corrosive. Weapons can be purchased from stores in towns and can be found within the fully destructible environment. In fact, smashing things up might even yield you a new car, which is just another way the game encourages you to destroy everything you see.

When you're driving the car, you see the world via a "follow" camera or, if you choose, free-look, (a turret cam may be added later). To aim your weapons, you must make sure enemies are in the Tach Arc, "our solution to mixing RPG and action," says Brown, "We didn't want a reticule—if was too 'shooter'—but you can think of the Tach Arc as a glant crosshair. Basically, your need to keep the bad guy in the arc."

What we thought: Though Auto Assault is set in a massive space, the gameplay following the story arc is pretty linear, as it is in: any driving game.

Why we were wrong: Now, instead of completing a mission and then following the big: overhead arrow to your next mission, like in a: typical driving game but on a bigger map, you? move through open areas called highways,. populated by hundreds of players all doing missions at once, to exits from these highways,

where instanced play occurs. Exit areas represent varied goals that require radically different strategies-another by-product of the multiteam development effort, "For example," Browntells us. "in one area, there may be a bunch of. flamethrowers that will make your ride overheat, so nonstop driving and firing isn't going: to help you. You have to figure out another strategy to achieve the mission,"

Convoying is one solution. Up to eight players (though that number may decrease to four) can join a convoy, uniting their unique abilities. to get the job done more quickly—although, Brown tell us, "Completing missions faster doesn't seem to be reason enough (to form convoys) for a lot of people [testing the beta], so we're working on giving them other reasons... Maybe you get increased powers in a certain mission if there's, say, a ranger in your group." Auto Assault's convoy system also makes it easy to join a group—instead of hanging out on: a server trying to engineer a group or beg your. way into an existing one, if you opt in to the system, you're automatically placed in a group, looking for a character of your class.

Most instanced play is PVE, player-versusenvironment missions in which you're playing. "against the game" to get further in the Auto Assault story. But while PVE accounts for the better part of the game, it reflects a core design decision, according to Brown: "[We wanted to] avoid, at the end, a scenario that looks like, everyone has this or everyone does this," so

if people Googled 'end of Auto Assault,' they could go to a webpage that tells them, 'Here's in how you do it; here's what to do and what to get and how to get it." To that end, actions you! take in instanced areas become part of your story. "Players are always asking that seminal question, 'How do I change the world?'" Brown' says. In the Auto Assault instances, you change, your world-so, for example, if you blow up a base in an instanced world and then you return. to that world after leaving it, the base is still in ruins-or maybe some A.I. is working on repairing it. There's no lining up to kill the dragon that keeps respawning for each player; even thoughyour character is part of the bigger story, you're also having "your" story...

What we thought: Auto Assault's PVP areas; would stick to traditional team-based combat. Why we were wrong: Well, we were half right. Arenas are areas of "balanced" combat. with traditional combat rules like capture the flag or deathmatch. This is where clans strive: for dominance, so you can fight clans from any server in an arena or spectate to see what: strategies other clans use. You always know... who's going to be there because the game uses the traditional setup of people looking for: arene-style play and agreeing to meet up inthe arena (which is on another server, although: that move is transparent, so you needn't log off one server and on to the other one)." NatDavil has not yet been decided whether H arena play will earn your character XP.

Auto Assault's PVP and PVE players aren't separated onto different servers—everyone is/ on the same map, but you can choose to enter-PVP "layers," such as arenas or...outposts. 🦖



AUTO ASSAULT IS NOT HERBIE THE LOVE BUG-IT'S AN ACTION RPG WITH PLAYERS USING CARS AS THEIR PRIMARY WEAPONS.









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AND 'the AND Anna lago, AND spring" and compositions from a subsection of the subsection of the Beamer his Advanced Mana Deaver his Advanced Mana Deaver his Advanced Management of the subsection of the subsecti



Dang-how is this not in our Hall of Fame already? Without the Prince, there's no Lara, for one thing. And Lara herself was inducted a while back. That's what the Prince gets for lacking

cleavage. But here it is, way overdue, official recognition of one of the best platform games ever, featuring then-revolutionary rotoscoped animation, awesome sword combat, and of course, those brilliant, maddening levels complete with spinning blades, falling platforms, and spiky floors, all designed to cause you maximum frustration followed by fist-pumping elation upon completion. The current Prince games (see our review of the latest on page 82) are cool too, but if you've never played the original, you should, Pure gaming bilss.

Sam & Max Hit the Road—arguably the best adventure game from LucasArts' golden years-brought the madcap adventures of artist Steve Purcell's sadistic comic duo to life. No game before and no game since has exhibited a sense of humor quite like it: From off-kilter puzzle solutions ("use Max with the World's Largest Bail of Twine") to loads of quirky dialogue that only these characters could get away with (Max; "Mind if I drive?" Sam; "Not if you don't mind me clawing at the dash and shneking like a cheerleader."), this game still holds up, 13

years after its release. No wonder fans have been clamoring for a sequel ever since



TOM CLANCY

Sure, the stealth-action genre first saw the light of day in console games like Tenchu and Metal Gear Solid, but the Tom-Clancy-branded Splinter Cell series-and its memorable protagonist, special agent Sam Fisher (voiced with a wonderfully world-weary edge by actor Michael Ironside)-quietly opened the door for PC gamers. Though saddled with story lines that reek of typical Clancy-esque geopolitical arcana, Splinter Cell doesn't disappoint at making you feel like a sneaky, deadly

spy. With two successively better sequels and a third on the way (see our preview on page 24). this already-classic franchise continues to make wide stades for its genre as one of the most noteworthy stealth-action games in recent years.





If flying a dubya-dubya-two fighter wasn't new, knowing that behind each and every foot soldier its cannons chewed up was a PO'ed player was. And the same goes for everything else about Battlefield 1942's historic hell-raising-free-falling from a flak-mangled Mustang. into a Tiger's turret or parachuting from a soon-to-be-seized bridge into the backseat of a passing bomber -you had to talk about it. had to tell someone because, well, until then these things never happened. It was something else, an experience that changed from moment to moment by design and ended up encouraging out-of thekill-box thinking as a by-product. It also inspired successful imitators of the "same deal, different setting" variety (see: Star Wars Battlefront and Joint Operations), along with existing franchises that incorporate key features (Unreal Tournament 2004).



DRIED THEOTON WAS MALE WHITE AND PROPERTY.

In 1996, two Canadian medical doctors showed up at the CGW offices bearing "Nerd Power" T-shirts and a demo of the r first-ever game, a MechWarrior clone called Shattered Steel. Had you told us that these two doctors would go on to turn their fledgling game company, BioWare, into one of the most important and influential development houses of the past 10 years, we

would have laughed out loud. But here we are, and here they are—sitting like giants atop the gaming world. In 1998 BioWare made Baldur's Gate, an outrageously deep, complex, and addictive role-playing game that single-handedly revived both PC RPGs and



time, if you can believe it. Feeling inadequate yet? Yeah. Us too.

the then-monband Dungeons & Dragons franchise, and set the stage for a series of brill ant RPGs made in collaboration with the now-defunct Black Isle Studios. It's been one classic after another for BioWare—Baldur's Gate II. Neverwinter Nights, and Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic—and the doctors show no signs of slowing down yet. They still practice medicine, too, in their spare

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THECGWHALLOFFAME

PEOPLE

Tim Schafer, Game Designer
Deni Bunton Worry, Game Designer
Jon Van Caneghem, Game Designer
John Carmack, Programmer
Richard Garriott, Game Designer
Ron Gilbert, Programmer, Game
Designer
Sid Meller, Game Designer
Roberta Williams, Game Designer
Will Wright, Game Designer

GAMES

ADAD "Gold Box" Games
(late '80s and early '90s)

Bejeweled (PopCap, 2000)

Interstate '76 (Activision, 1897)

No One Lives Forever

(Fox Interactive, 2000)

Alone in the Dark (I-Molion, 1992)

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn.
(Interplay, 2001)

The Bard's Tale (EA, 1985)

Battle Chese (Interplay, 1988)

Battleground series

(TalonSoft, 1995-present)

Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamik, 1993)

Chessmaster (Sokware Toolworks, 1986)

Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)

Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995) Counter-Strike (Mod. 1999) Crusader: No Remorse (Origin, 1995): Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight (LucasArts, 1999) Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1993) Diable (Blizzard, 1997) Doom (ld Software, 1993) Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987) Earl Wesver Baseball (EA, 1986) Empire (Interstel, 1978) EverQueet (Sony Online, 1999) F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988) Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991) Fallout (Interplay, 1997) Front Page Sports: Football Pro (Dynamix, 1993) Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within (Siems, 1996) Gottysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986) Grim Fundango (LucasArts, 1999) Gunahip (MicroProse, 1986) Haff-Life (Valve Software, 1999)

Herpoon (360 Pacific, 1989)

Heroes of Might and Magic II"

(New World Computing, 1997)

High Heat Baseball 2000 (3DO, 1999)

John Madden NFL Football Series (3DO, 1999) Kempfgruppe (981, 1985) King's Queet V (Sierra On-Line, 1990) Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991) Links 366 Pro (Access Software, 1992) M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1989) Master of Maglo (MicroPrese, 1994) Master of Orion (MicroProse, 1993) Medieval: Total War, (MicroProse, 1987) Mech Brigade (SSI, 1985) MechWarrior 2 (Activision, 1995) Might and Magic (New World Computing, 1986) M.U.L.E. (EA, 1983) Myth (Bungle, 1997) Panzer General (SSI, 1994) Planescape: Torment (MicroProse, 1987) Pirates (MicroProse, 1987) Quake (Id Software, 1996) Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, 1990) Red Baron (Dynamix, 1990) The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990) 5ImCity (Mexis, 1967) The Sims (Maxis, 2000) StarCraft (Blizzard, 1998)

And the state of t

Starflight (Electionic Arts, 1986) System Shock 2 (Hectronic Arts, 1999) Tetrie (Spectrum HoloByte, 1988) Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1989) TIE Fighter (LucaeArts, 1994) Tomb Raider (Eidos, 1996) Ultima III (Origin Systems, 1983) Ultime IV (Origin Systems, 1985) Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990) Ullima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992) Unreal Tournement (360 Pricing 1988) War in Russia (SSI, 1984) WerCreft II (Bilzzerd, 1996) Westeland (Interplay, 1996) Wing Commander (Origin System) Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991) Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994) Wizardry (Sir-Tech, 1981) Wolfenstein 3D (Id Software, 1992) X-COM (MicroProse, 1994) You Don't Know Jack (Berkeley Systems, 1996) Zork (Infocom, 1981)



SOFTWARE BOOK

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how to draw a picture or use Photoshop. All the fonts, word balloons, and applets you need are in the box—allowing you to grab images and drop... them into your own austom comic book!



AEON PLUX

\$7 MATINEE

As If Ason Flux will still be in theaters! This was just a sneaky: way to slip in a plug for the newly remastered collection of the entire animated series: which just came out on DVD;

It will stands the test of time and has got to bit. better then the flick. Since we're being honest, we might still see the movie as it was originally Intended: drunk at 2 a.m. on Cinemax. Hey, Wa: Charlize Theron in a neoprene jumpeuit.



uzzy 20-sided

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over its rearview mirror. But these aren't your garden variety d6-oh no. Proudly show your true geak colors with this pair of plush 20-sided. dice. How elee do you plan on making that saving? throw versus speeding tickets?

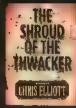


LOVELESS

S3 OCCOMICS COM

We love Westerns, Activision recently took a shot at making a game in the genre with Gun (eoo review page 81), and we're happy to see the dawning of a new cowboy comic

rennissance. Brian Azzarello (100 Bullets) is bringing back the old-school spaghetti Western llevor with Loveless—the story of Was Cutter, a man twisted by the Civil War who is just trying to make peace with himself and the world. You thought HBO's Deadwood gave you a new taste: of the West? There's plenty more bloodshed and cussing here than you'll ever see on TV. Grab an lesue of Loveless and see for yourself, pard.



THE SHROUD OF THE THWACKER

\$15 AMAZON,COM-

New York in 1882 was a strange place. What with all manner of distractions, such as gaspowered, wooden cell phones and checkered hansom cabe

nobody bothered to find relatively unknown serial killer Jack the Jolly Thwacker. That is, until Chris. Ellott, of Cabin Boy and Get a Life tame, decides: to literally go back in time to track him . Elilott's ... Whacked-out comic murder mystery is sure to get you thinking (between laughs), "What the hell was he on when he wrote this?"



EXIES: EAD FOR THE

\$11 AMAZON.COM

Most people who listen to the Exles—even for a short time-start wondering the

same thing: "Why aren't they bigger?" Take a sampling of this, their third disc, and appracia the raw sounds of "Slow Drain" as Head for the Door opens. The riffs on "Splinter" will get under your skin. And that's saying nothing of "Uply." "Hay You," and "Baptize Me." Give it a listen!



NOWHERE MAN \$35 AMAZON.COM

In our continuing efforts to dig up obecure TV series that inexplicably get canceled. we present Nowhere Men Photographer Thomas Veil has seen something he wasn't

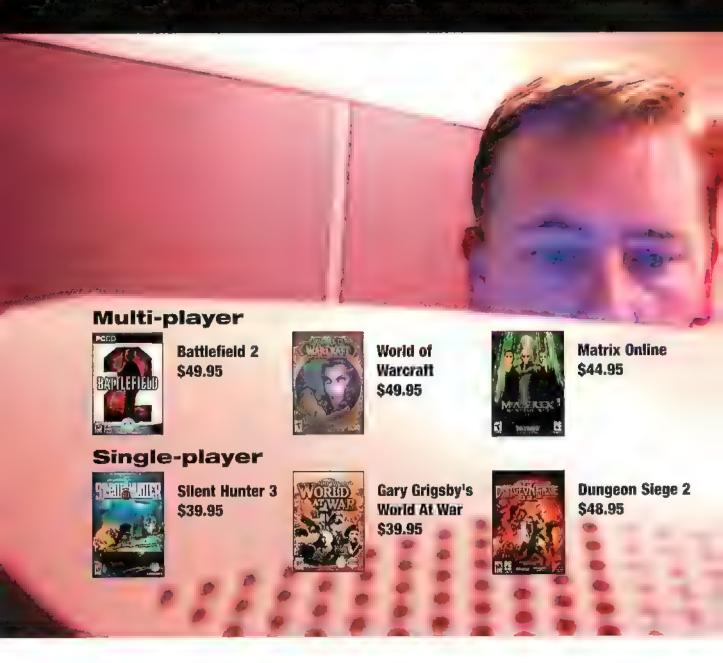
supposed to see. As a result, his entire life has been erased and he's on the run. Is he crazy or is there really a conspiracy to steal his identity? A little sheed of its time, the 25 episodes that once sired on UPN are all collected here. Don't expect's miraculous ratum to the air for the series, just enjoy. the brief paranold ride.

POCKET CHANGE: 50

upcoming games

JANUARY 2008	FOR		
25 to Life	Eidos Interactivo		
American Conquest: Divided Nation	CDV Software		
Hilman: Blood Money	Eldos Interactive		
Jawa Unloashed	Minjeraco		
Just Onuso	Bidas Internative		
WWII Tank Commander	Got Game		
FEBRUARY 2006			
The Apprentice	VU Girmos		
Battleground Europe: World War II Online	Tri Synorgy		
Commandos: Strike Force	Eidos Interactivo		
Curious George	Names		
Dungoons & Dragona Onlino: Storemach	Ateri		
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2К Силов		
Empire Earth II: The Art of Supremacy	VU Games		
Foor and Respect	Michway		
Fear Factor	Hip Interactive		
Galactic Civilizations (I: Dread Lords	Stardock		
Herses of Might and Megic V	Uhisolt		
Maro Boko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Mtari		
Origin of the Species: Project G.I.	Tri Synargy		
S.T.A.LK.E.R · Shadow of Chemobyl	THQ		
Scarface: The World is Yours	VU Games		
Snow	2K Games		
Stacked with Daniel Negreams	Myelis Media		
Stor Wars Empire at War	LucasArts		
Storgato SG-1: The Alliance	Namco		
Torsk Raider Lagend	Eldos Interactive		
Tycoon City; New York	Atari		
UFO: Extraterrestrials	Tri Synergy		
Chia Chia Sanina			
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Ublsoft		
LoTR: The Battle for Middle-earth ()	Electronic Arts		
Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisatt		
WINTER/SPRING 2006			
Age of Consn: Hyborian Adventures	Funcom		
Auto Assault	NCsoft		
Bad Day LA	Enlight Interactive		
Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends	Microsoft		
Titan Quest	1100		

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LANGUAGE BARRIERS

33.6KBPS. NOT A WHOLE LOT YOU can do at that speed nowadays. Sifting through all those erectile dysfunction e-mails alone could take hours! Imagine trying to play an MMO at that snail's pace over the internet. In 1997, when Ultima went online, that's what people had to deal with. Combati was more-or-less turn-based, and the only realistic way for these hardcore gamers to communicate with each other was through ingame text chat windows.

Now here we are, at the dawn of 2006.
Graphics have improved exponentially and broadband internet is spreading. Why, then, are we still relying upon the same basic game mechanics to get by? Why is it that most MMO games continue to bog down



The next big NCselt title to push action (and voice chat) after Auto Assault is Tabula Rasa.

with windows, menus, and obscure commands to memorize?

Anyone can point out that broadband access still lan't widespread enough to reach all gamers, so one instant hurdle is that there continue to be people playing at less-than-optimal speeds. More than that, though, MMO games, in most cases, still aren't as accessible as they could be, with their clandestine control schemes catering to more hardcore players. Try sitting a first-time player down at the keyboard and most are overwhelmed with all the menus, controls, and chat commands and the novella-sized instruction tome. What we have here isn't a failure to communicate, just a failure to find a better way to do it.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

World of WarCraft, as we all know, has gone a long way toward fixing this problem and has served as a "gateway" game to other MMOs. Everyone has a story of converts. "Some-friends of mine always thought that MMO games were for dorks," says Webzen America's director of corporate communications, Jason Wonacctt, with a hint of Irony. "They tried WOW out of curtosity and got hooked. Now they are playing Guild Wars as well." World of WarCraft did not reinvent but simply refined the classic MMO experience, making it far easier to pick up and play. Lesson learned: Remove the barriers of entry and millions will the up. But han it gone far enough?

"[Publishers] need to start taking our cues from casual and console games," says

Robert Garriott, CEO of NCsoft America.
"Most MMOs in the United States are hard to get into, with a difficult interface. After all these years it is starting to change, but it needs to change further if we hope to attract more players." Next-gen MMOs will need a clean interface, and according to Garriott, they will need to be intuitive enough to play without an instruction manual.

"Take Auto Assault," he says, "We're delaying the game six months to work on refining the user interface into something more in line with what you'd expect for a console action game." With every new game they develop, Garriott sees NCsoft making more approachable games to grab a wider audience. Console action MMOs continue to attract people in Asia with games like Nexon's Kart Rider or the 3-on-3 basketball game FreeStyle by JC Entertainment. NCsoft is the first major U.S. MMO publisher to announce far-reaching plans to bring these corts of games Stateside.

Action MMOs have come to the United States, but they still suffer from being overly complex—Sony Online Entertainment's action—based MMO shooter, *PlanetSide*, is a good example. The overly ambitious game tried tackling a number of things at once: a persistent world that players can impact through action, on- and offline stat tracking, and even voice chat. Great ideas—but not well implemented and perhaps a bit shead of their time.

Voice chat, in particular, is a technology whose time has come. In a fast-paced action game, you don't want to go fumbling for the



keyboard to issue commands, in PlanetSide, the technology wasn't Implemented well enough, so dedicated players turned to third-party voice-chat software that had been floating around for years, like Roger Wilco, TeamSpeak, and Ventrito. Bich Lawrence, director of technology for Sony Online Entertainment, says that "One of the challenges we have right now is creating the equivalent of teleconference software, which is quite expensive. You need to have 30 or 40 people in a battle situation able to talk interactively with the lowest possible bandwidth." But there's more to voice chat than just organizing an attack.

Garriott tells of ambitious plans going forward: "We are creating a voice-chat system that will be incorporated into many NCsoft games going forward, starting with Auto Assault and Tabula Rasa." You'll also be able to communicate across games or even outside of games altogether, kind of like what Xbox Live is doing right now.

Chris Satchell, general manager of Microsoft's Game Developer Group, tells of similar features that will be part of Microsoft's upcoming new operating system, Windows-Vista. "One of the best ways to attract new players is a simple experience," he says. "Vista will do a lot of this as we bring the Live service to Windows. People will have a greater sense of community in a secure environment: where they can communicate within and outside of games."

Satchell believes that voice chat is a more viable communication method for MMO gam-

ers, especially in action games. The only concern that many publishers have with going all voice: When designing a game interface, you still need to expect people to want to use keyboards. Not everyone is going to have a headset or—God forbid—buy a gamepad.

OPEN PLAYGROUNDS

With the next generation of consoles comes renewed talk of cross-platform online gaming the ability for console gamers and PC gamers to play the same game at the same time.

The first company to successfully bridge the platform gap was, of course, Square Enix. Final Fantasy XI first paired up Japanese PC: and PS2 players in 2002. Now the game is global and coming to the Xbox 360. "The biggest difference between the consoles and the PCs up to this point has been the presence of a hard drive," says FFXI producer Hiromichi Tanaka. With the next generation that won't, be as much of an Issue. He continues, "The true era of cross-platform gaming is about to begin." That means more keyboards plugging into more consoles to play FFXI. Microsoft allows for a USB keyboard on the 350, but why stop there? What about USB mouse support? MS is actually taking it into consideration, according to Satchell.

The biggest feer with cross-platform gaming is that it will "dumb down" the MMO experience, sepecially in action-oriented titles, where the precision of a mouse and keyboard could give PC players an edge over the "fuzzier" console controls. One interesting test will be

Huxley, Webzen's upcoming MMO shooter that's coming to both the PC and the Xbox 360.
Webzen's Wonacott believes that this will > _____



◆ The ambitious MMO Huxley—an FPS that's bringing consele gamera to the fight.



 Like Nexon's Kart Rider, JC Entertainment's Pre-Style is a hunely popular vesual MMO in Asia.

bring more awareness to the MMO space, but even he, as an FPS player, was concerned at first about how to level the playing field for PC, and console gamers. While unable to go into details, he assures us that the development team is doing just that, "We've recently hit a major milestone, and I can tell you that console gamers will have tots of ways to hold their own."

Says Satchell on the matter: "I have friends at Bungle who will stand up and fight to say that the gamepad can be as good a controller as the keyboard and mouse." We'll soon see for ourselves as the Xbox 360 controller becomes supported by more PC developers.

TMI OR TMA?

Beyond PC or console gaming lies one ubiquitous controller that most people have nevereven considered: the cell phone.

Imagine someone on a PC controlling the tactical command of a game, RTS style. At the same, time, a console gamer is playing a platforming/action game. Meanwhile, someone on a mobile, phone is contributing to the cause. Anytime, anywhere, you can participate with your online friends and play. The term for this is "transmedial access" (TMA). The trick is how to get it to work.

Vicky Wu, founder and CEO of Froghop, has been a champion of TMA gaming since 2002. The obvious applications at first involved selling goods, text-messaging friends, and checking stats. But that won't out it, "[TMA] technology needs to be built in to a game early on, not tacked on as an afterthought," she says. "You need to figure out a way to integrate a new type of player, [and] improve upon the MMO treadmill and the ways that you interact with the world."

Wu describes how it could work: "Puzzle games are popular on cell phones and easy to control. How about if you created a minigame for cell-phone players to work in the larger MMO world as code breakers? In the same way a healer is needed on key missions, you'll need to make sure a code breaker is available while the neet of the team is fighting off monsters. This way you can attract new, specialized players with different gaming habits and make them feel, like a valued member of a team."

The problem back in 2002 when Wu started evangelizing (and which continues today) is the limitations of wireless data speeds. 3G networks are slowly stretching across North America, but that isn't enough. Tanaka explains that Square Enix has been working on cell-phone extensions of FFXI for some time now, but they'verun into speed bumps: "We have a nearly complete interface for controlling in-game chat, auctions, and gardening your moghouse using mobile hardware. However, this requires tots of data packets." Considering the costs involved, Square Enix had to put the project on hold.

Right now, wireless game publisher SkyZone Entertainment is a little more gung he about the state of TMA. SkyZone is the first to bring an MMORPG, Ragnarok Online, to cell phones in North America. By early 2005, players will be able to build up characters on their mobile devices while away from a computer. If they don't want to sign up for the MMO, Ragnarok Online can also serve as a stand-alone game. Ryu il Young, CEO of developer Gravity, has said, "[We] expect the



→ Final Fantasy XI brought the "slassic" MMORPG experience to the PS2—keyboard and all.



"YOU NEED TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO INTE-GRATE A NEW TYPE OF PLAYER."

-VICKY WU. FOUNDER AND CEO OF FROGHOP

overseas expansion of mobile games to accelerate quickly though this North American advance.

How soon before the MMO world is truly interconnected, though? Michael Pachter, managing director of research for Wedbush Morgan Securities, believes that "Cross-platform and transmedial access is necessary to really give-MMOs a chance at being universally accepted... and at this point it's a chicken-and-egg issue." Pachter believes that If Sony and Microsoft get together, the audience for MMO games expands five- to tenfold. However, both need to see howthey benefit from providing universal access. As for transmedial gaming—it is interesting, but Pachter sees consoles getting linked up better before call phones take off, "The simple point," he says, "Is that anything that expands access: to more people is likely to drive greater participation. That means more ways to collect revenue." Just don't expect to see anything big until late in: this decade or early in the next one.

Microsoft's Satchell says, "I cen't give you a year, but I absolutely think that you'll see this; happen within the Xbox 380's lifetime."

/ Darren Gladstone



One vary basic possibility for transmedial access on cell phones: auctions.

CGW SAYS:

HOW LONG BEFORE THERE'S wireless broadband internet access everywhere or someone just slaps a data jack in the back of your head? Please, just give us a variety of ways to access a game—different windows into the same world.

Vicky Wu's idea of a code-breaker-type class incorporated into a game is a brilliant example of what developers need to do—and they already are. Wu intimated that she's currently working with a major publisher on a game where you'll be able to coordinate actions via mobile devices. The Important point to remember: Rather than simply porting identical experiences between platforms, developers must find other ways people can interact with each other in the same game space white creating a different experience.

Speaking of interacting, just because MMOs began with a keyboard and mouse doesn't mean they need to end that way. Voice chat is a logical step, Here's a crazy thought: How about in-game voice chat conducted between PC, console, and cell-phone gamers? And we shouldn't neglect the gamepad, either, which can only open up more avenues of play. Auto Assault, which we can't seem to say enough about ately, played just fine with the Xbox 360 controller in the beta test (and will support in-game chat as well). Who knows? We may even see that driving MMO cruise to consoles.

The next few years will be interesting ones, for sure. And if Windows Vista delivers on the promise of removing barriers for new gamers, this only means good things for us—namely, more potential online targets.

Coming Soon...



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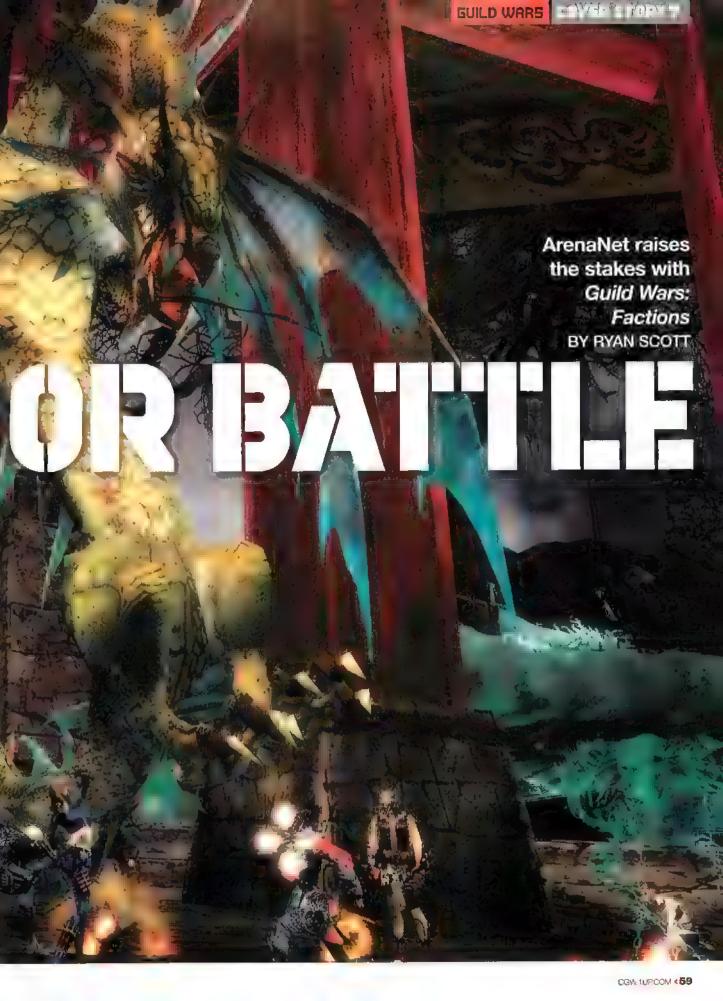
Not many PC games hit that landmark sweet spot. Hell, even most music CDs don't see those kinds of numbers. Yet in the space of just eight short months, the ArenaNet-developed Guild Wars—an innovative, PVP-friendly MMORPG that took the online world by storm thanks to its lack of a monthly subscription fee—has achieved the kind of success that most game companies only dream about. Then again, when you cram a bunch of ex-Blizzard developers in a room and tell them to go nuts, perhaps runaway success is the only logical result.

After leaving their one-time home at Blizzard Entertainment, ArenaNet cofounders Mike O'Brien (creator of Blizzard's Battle.net service), Jeff Strain (formerly World of WarCraft's team lead), and Patrick Wyatt (formerly Battle.net's lead programmer) spent over three years developing and fine-tuning Gulid Wars.

"We ran a three-year alpha test and a six-month beta test before releasing Gulid Wars, so we were confident that it was a fun and

polished game," says O'Brien. "[But] the experience of having hundreds of thousands of players playing through [it] month after month and providing feedback has shown us other areas where we need to keep evolving the game to keep it interesting,"

For those of you who aren't on the bandwagon just yet, Guild Wars players can create role-playing characters to progress through the game's lengthy story line or PVP characters to partake exclusively in player-versus-player arenas and guild combat. O'Brien explains, "The original intent of Guild Wars was that people who built up role-playing characters and played through all the content would eventually want to start using those characters in PVP. We've [now] seen that many players want to continue to focus exclusively on role-playing content." The solution: Guild Wars: Factions, an all-new stand-alone campaign that features two new professions, a huge Eastern-themed continent to explore, and a much more seamless marnage between PVE and PVP gameplay mechanics.



THE ASSASSIN

Not-so-silent, but oh-so-deadly, the assassing combines speed, magic, and dagger expertise to form one hell of a living killing machine. Essentially mystical ninjas, players with this profession focus on single-target attacks using twin daggers. Critical strikes are the assassin's forte; her dagger skills bring with them a lethal series of chained combination. moves divided into primary, off-hand, and dual-strike attacks. The assassin delivers these blows in sequence for massive damage—and she looks good doing it, exhibiting an impressive assortment of acrobatio animations that chain together along with her dagger limitels. She can also teleport around the battlefield, foll her foes with painful caltrops. and hex troublesome targets, rendering them unable to block her attacks. Don't expect any kind of warrior-caliber armor-but with this, kind of speed and power, who needs it?).

ATTRIBUTES

itical Strikes (Primary Attribute)

Increases the chance of scoring critical hits and awards the assassin with energy upon a successful crit. ...

seer Mastery: Powerful dual-dagger strikes that combo for big damage.

Deadly Arts: Hex spells and other offensive magic.

Shadew Arts: Teléportation techniques and defensive magic. ___

SKILLS

Jagged Strike: A primary attack that causes the target to bleed.

Viper Strike: An unblockable, nonevadeble offhand attack,

or Wings A dual strike that knocks down an opponent who has no allies near him.

When used on an opponent with less then half health, this nine skill rocharges eli of your attacks...

Teleporie you to your target, and heals you if he

> has more health: This evasion enhancer,also boosts your health.

increases your chances of sooning a critical hit.

One obvious (new) combination is the assessin/elementalist, who can use teleportation skills to make points blank area-of-effect skills that much more? potent." -Factions designer James Phinney



WELCOME



The original Guild Wars introduced the world of Tyria-and, more specifically, the continent of Ascalon, Though Ascalon's design arquably breaks the fantasy mold by bearing more of a resemblance to Conan than Lord of the Rings, ArenaNet fell the need for something different with Factions. Instead of presenting more Western-style fantasy, the three-nation continent of Cantha exhibits an Asign-inspired motif

"We saw this campaign as a great opportunity to explore Asian art styles and cultural sensibilities and to bring to life the great Canthan Empire that was hinted at in [the original] Guild Wars," says Factions designer James Phinney. "As we looked at the core ideas and concept art for some of the new locations-such as a sea of solid jade designed to evoke the bolk of ocean waves and an overcrowded city so densely populated that buildings are stacked on buildings-we felt confident that these would be cool and unique places "

We get our first glimpse of Cantha in the opening cinematic, which reveals the emperor's murder at the hands of his bodyguard, Shiro Tagachi Tagachi is captured and killed for his sin-though his death cry has the unpleasant effect of turning vast seas. and forests to jade, making life a little more miserable for the good people of Cantha. Now, some 200 years later, Tagachi returns-and the burden of stopping him rests squarely on players' shoulders as they explore this exotic new land.

The differences between Ascalon and Cantha become apparent as soon as you step into the Shing Jea Monastery, which acts as Fections' tutorial area. Newly created Canthan characters (check out the sidebars for details on the new assassin. and ritualist professions) must brave the challenges of this Ush valley area in order to earn the respect of Master Togo and his stall, who prepare the monastery's students for the autside world. The tutonal quests provide a much more comprehen-



ARENANET FELT THE NEED FOR SOME-



TO CANTHA



▲ The new Shing Jea Monastery tutorial area.



▲ The Jade Quarry offers a team PVP scenario.

sive summary of the Guild Wars experience, even going so far as to include strategic acenarios that pop up in high-level play. One such quest partners up teams of players with an NPC instructor who gives advice on calling targets, avoiding monster patrols, and using other advanced group tactics.

LOOKING FOR GROUP

Group dynamics aren't anything new to Guild Wars stalwarts, though, the tutorial merely offers a taste of what's to come. Factions encourages group-oriented gameplay even more than the original game did by offering story-based missions that match groups for cooperative and competitive objectives. In one of the early missions, Courthouse Square, Canthan characters must accompany their mentor to Lion's Arch, which current players should recognize as Ascalon's bustling port city. These players meet up with Brother Mhenlo-one of many familiar NPCs returning from the original campaign-and his party of midlevel player characters from Ascalon: the two groups team up to combat a common threat, and victory opens the gateway between the two campaigns for both parties. Another cooperative mission that we managed to get our hands on. The Unwaking Waters, teams two eight-player groups for a multistage battle against a corrupt dragon lord who guards an ancient temple beneath a whirlpool of pure jade

For players with more competitive spirit in their blood, some of Factions' story missions involve direct conflict between players, putting two groups at odds over a single objective. Players now have the option of joining either the Luxons or the Kurz cks-two warring factions that figure heavily into the game's story line. These two groups collide throughout the game in missions such as The Jade Quarry, in which two teams of players and NPCs battle for territorial supremacy over a trio of jade mines. Though the victory conditions allow for only one winner, this mission—and each of Factions' 14 other campaign missions—features a three-tier ranking system (and cumulative rewards) to measure success. "In this way," says designer Eric Flannum, "we hope to encourage players to replay the story missions while maintaining and reinforcing shared goals."

THE RITUALIST

This guy may be blindfolded, but hey—he doesn't need to be able to see you in order, to kill you. The ritualist, who resembles something of a dark, savage priest, can see into the ethereal realm and commune with its spiritual inhabitants. In game terms, he's something of an odd mixture of ranger," necromancer, and monk: He summons spirits: whose life forces can be used to power offensive magic, healing, and even resurrection 🤟 spells. He might bind a spirit that absorbs a percentage of damage dealt to party mem-i bers within its radius of effect, or perhaps sacrifice a spirit's health in order to mend an ally's wounds. From a design standpoint, the ritualist provides a handy-albeit micromanagement-intensive-alternative to the monk, making for an excellent support character that can fill a wide variety of needs.

ATTRIBUTES

Spawning Power (Primary Attribute):

Increases the durability of the rituellet's spirite and other creatures, such as ranger pets.

Channeling Magic: The ritualist's direct-damage spell line.

Communing Magic: Creates immobile spirit creatures that the ritualist can use to power, paraious spells and effects.

Restoration Megic: Healing spells and other defensive magic.

SKILLS

Essence Strike: if you're standing near a summoned spirit, this gives you a quick energy boost.

Spirit Burn: Causes direct damage to the target, magnified depending on how close you are to a spirit.

Spirit Fift: High-damage area of effect spell:
Channeled Strike: Causes damage, which
is magnified if you are holding
an Kem
through which to channel it.

Shefter: A summoned spirit that protects all alles within its radius from high-damage attacks.

Pain: A spirit that attacks enemies.

Piech of My Piecis.

Quickly resurrects a fallen ally at the cost

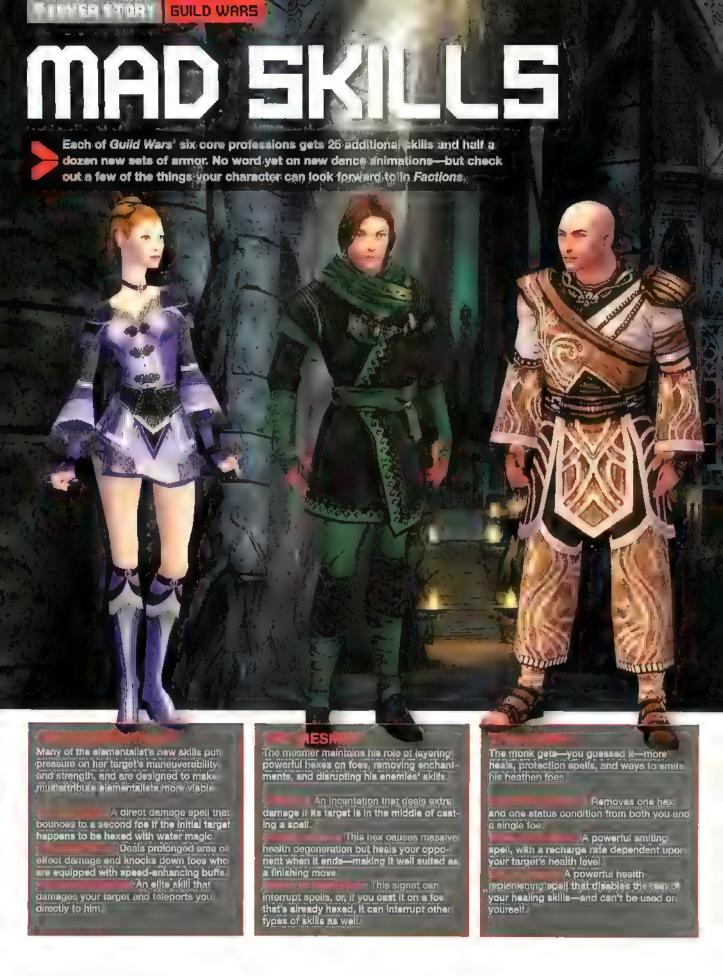
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your lically

"It's true that one of the goals with the ritualist is to provide an alternative to monks, but primarily, we're looking for these professions to find a unique role in Guild Wars."



CGW LIPCOM (61







LEVEL 20...PRE-SEARING?

(se—apparently, it's possible to reach the eveloop before you even leave Chief Wei-Leonial sees. For the crisi hardoors (at ma A STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TWO IS NOT THE OWNER.

Create a new character and do the first couple of introductors (quests (representations). Message Prox. at Ward, and the fact for your contention.

Start killing random moneters—but make sure you don't complete and of the other quests. While you're doing The you might went to have a secondary profession and track down as many of the rodución, kidis de you em as this cois Proc. you start hitting are microses level 7 and los. I'm lime to level north or the wa 1 Laketon County West It from 12 hearts seen the petal of patting some algreen District You can aid in about a good 19. 13 this way.

Go wheed and finish all of the tutorial quests, which should push you up into the mid-to-high teens

let the high-level monsters kill you. Repealedly. Moneters gain experience use and eventually level up accordings Show you've got a supply of buffethup Contain welling in the wings, start hunter, was said loop repeating the process uses on hit level 20. New go back so sown type "/dance", and offer to sell your secret for exorbitant amounts of gold.



FACTION WAR

The Luxon and Kurzick factions also provide a handy means

for ArenaNet to rope more players into Guild Wars' PVP community, as players can now take part in a tense faction war that encompasses the vast majority of Cantha's 55 maps. Player guilds may band together to form massive albances within their chosen faction; these alliances fight with players from the opposing faction for control of various maps.

"These tend to be langer matches that encourage multiple objectives, with

smaller units within each team working together toward a common goal," Phinney explains, "At the end of each of these PVP sessions, control of the map shifts, depending on which side won more of its matches."

Players can also earn faction points by succeeding in the aforementioned competitive story missions and fighting in PVP arenas, Successful alliances enjoy added benefits that include discounted merchant prices in controlled areas, special areas that no one else may travel to, and the prominent display of the alliance's banner in occupied cities.

But will non-PVP players embrace these faction mechanics? Flannum thinks so: We believe that the vast majority of players will want to participate in the faction warfare. We've purposely designed this system to take into account as many play styles as we possibly can-and since there are so many

ways to earn faction points for your alliance, we believe it will appeal to a very broad player base."

Faction warfare isn't the be-all, end-all of Guild Wars PVP, though; existing guild halls get their own tweaks and upgrades in Factions, Player guildmasters can finally add NPCs like merchants and storage agents to their headquarters. and much-requested features, such as additional guild storage and scrimmage play, are on the way as well. For guilds that are thinking of renovating, some new guild halfs are available for purchase, including a ritzy Canthan palace and a g ant Luxon fortress that towers above the landscape.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

PVP arenas, on the other hand, get a complete change of scenery: Ascalon Arena, the Tomb of the Primeval Kings, and all of Guild Wars' other



PLAYER GUILDS MAY BAND TOGETHER TO FORM MASSIVE ALLIANCES WITHIN THEIR CHOSEN FACTION.



competitive areas will soon be transplanted to their own continent, aptly named the Battle Isles. With PVP arenas no longer tred specifically to Ascalon or Cantha, all arenas become available to anyone who purchases either of the two Guild Wars campaigns; upon reaching Lion's Arch (or Factions' equivalent porticity), characters gain immediate access to the PVP continent.

And in an effort to ease new players into the PVP experience, this continent also features a practice area where players can exper ment, try out new character builds, and trein against computer opponents. "We're arranging PVP content in a natural progress on," says O'Brien. "New players learn the ropes by playing against computer opponents and later playing in competition arenas before going on to compete in [PVP] tournaments."

CREATED EQUAL

Since Factions is a stand-alone product in a franchise that encourages fierce competition between players, will those who are jumping

into Guild Wars for the first time be at a disadvantage due to owning only one product? Phinney doesn't think so. "We're working very hard to make sure people can compete on equal footing—whether they [purchass] one campaign, two campaigns, or even more. We've set aside a subset of skills that we consider the 'core skills,' which are available in every campaign in order to guarantee balance." Prinney is also quick to point out that players with established characters get

players with established characters get just as much bang for their buck: "All of the most unique and exciting additions to the game, such as alliances, multiparty maps, competitive missions, territory wars, and new [items] will be accessible and balanced for existing level-20 characters, and existing characters can come over to Cantha and change their secondary profession to nitualist or assassin if they so desire."

And Factions just gets things started—if things go according to plan, Guild Wars fanatics can look forward to two new campaigns per year. "Our philosophy is to try to make the game rewarding for everyone, however they like to play," Phinney muses. "Really, Factions was a matter of looking at what kinds of things we wish our Guild Wars characters could do next. We knew it wouldn't be enough to just have another set of missions to go through—we wanted to give players a chance to leave their mark on the world."



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BIG SCREEN, SMALL SCREEN



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Battlefield 2: Special Forces It's "special" all right.



King Kong Chamby minkey



4.5-5.0 Stars:

Excellent
Landmark products
and benchmarks for
their entire genres.
Games achieving these
scores earn a CGW
Editor's Choice award.



3.5-4.0 Stars: Good

Certain limitations may hold these games back, but they can still be enjoyed by the majority of the PCgaming populace.



2.5-3.0 Stars: Average

of those for online games like MMOs that autoupdate as a standard part of their operation and those specifically selected for our patch review page.

We do this so we are reviewing exactly what you, the consumer, are buying.

> These games don't do anything exceptionally well. We recommend them strictly to the most hardcore of genre enthuslasts.



1.5-2.0 Stars: Weak

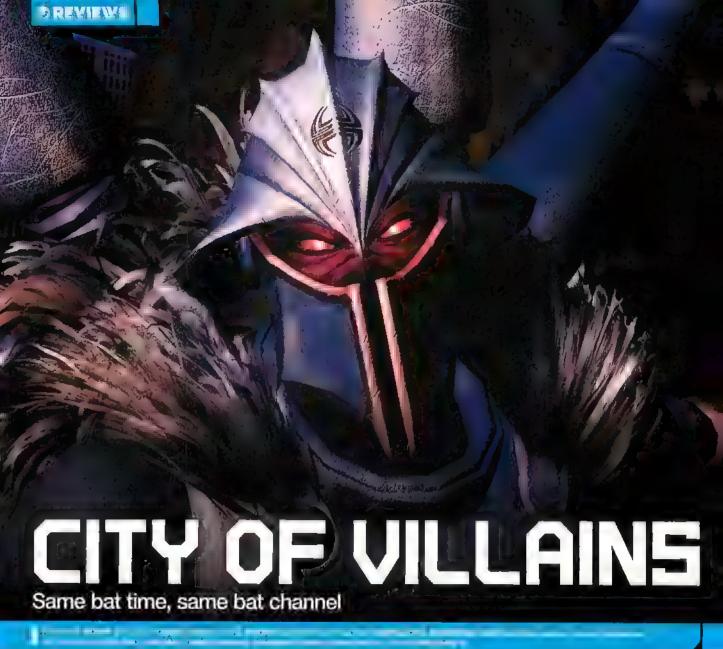
Games with significant bugs or other fundamental design Issues that even genre fans will have trouble coming to terms with.



0.0-1.0 Stars: Abysmal

Games that should never have been made—let alone purchased. A zero-star game is bug-ridden and unplayable.





feelings of UNEASINESS NOW CIRCUlate throughout City of Hamons' Paraman.

Can Load Hucture and this vitain prove, the nafarious Arachnos, want their home in the adjacent Rogue Isles to become a city of villains, bent on eliminating Paragon's meddling heroes.

Arachnos is accepting any and all wannabe-villain applications—and that's where you enter the picture in this stand-alone pseudo-expansion to CGW's 2004 MMORPG of the Year, which gave players the chance to play tights-wearing, high-flying, elaborately designed comic-book-style superheroes, designed in an elaborate character creation tool limited only by the imagination.

City of Villains' own character creation tool contains enough creepy new skull, werewolf, pirate, militia, insect, bone, chain, and reptillan paraphernailia to ture Bela Lugosi back from the grave. Besides, harboring COH's nigh-unlimited costume stash, COV also features its newly upgraded graphics. engine, where fine details, bloom effects, and ragdoll physics abound.

REFINED BUT NOT REDEFINED

Oddiy, despite the new array of villainous costuming, you'll feel more like a hero than an Arachnos alde-de-camp. COV routinely forces you to fight villainous mobs, and even your kidnapping victims follow you complacently to your destination. So many of COH's maps, enemies, and powers get recycled that COV feels like a big expansion pack—which might be OK for new players, but COH veterans should prepare for some serious déjà vu

Most cities beyond the starting area's flashy:
Arechnos base look very similar to the sesside ports;
from COH, albeit dinter. Moreover, although you
occasionally get to rob banks and casinos or fight;
in new laboratory areas, most instanced missions
consist of warehouses, offices, and caves ripped
straight from COH and populated with COH's vil-

ilains. Only about half the monsters—and a quarter? of the available character archetypes' powers—are risw, though most of the reworked archetypes pro-wide a decidedly more solo-friendly PVE experience.

INJUSTICE LEAGUE

Dominators, with their moderately demaging ranged and melee attacks, run crowd control—but low filt points limit large confrontations. On the other hand, the only thing brutes have to fear is developed Cryptic Studios' Nerf bat: This massively destructive archetype has melee attacks and defenses that utilize powers from COH's energy, fire, and stone sets, making it just as unstoppable as the rousing new, mastermind archetype.

Directing up to six upgradable henchmen (divided into ninja, mercenary, robot, and necromencer types) while managing their own attacks and support powers gets tricky, but masterminds handle it well. The only negatives: Henchies block doorways tend to push players aside, and must be resummened each time you enter a new map.

Corruptors combine radiation, sonic, and elemental ranged attacks with healing capabilities, while



CITY OF HEROES VETERANS SHOULD PREPARE FOR SOME SERIOUS DÉJÀ VU

SCORPIONS?

It's the scorpion king! Its the scorpion wing:
Black Scorpion—ane
of COV's big, bad
supervitions—file the
game's acorpion quotient nicely



Yeu'll really flip at how much damage your stalker's assassin strike causes.



New meneters, like these shivens, He into the objective-oriented PYP xenes.



The deminator gais same seel plant-related abilities, but her theres power set is a sut-copy-paste from the COH scrapper's own spine powers.

moves using melee weapons, netherworld powers, or martial arts. Unfortunately, their low hit points, prevent extended skirmishes.;

CLASH OF THE TITANS

Regardless of which archetype you choose, you'll inevitably run afoul of a few do-gooding heroic characters sooner or later. Villains can't visit Paragon City (or vice varse), but three optional PVP. zonsa provide handy forums for superpowered smackdowns, Player levels automatically adjustto 15 in Bloody Bay, 25 in Siren's Call, and 38 in: Warburg; the first two zones provide some structured heroes-versus-viltains engagement rules, while the third gives bloodthirsty players a free-forall combat zone.

But beer two things in mind before you settle on world domination: First, you may temporarily lose; powers and eligibility for certain missions if your actual level exceeds the PVP zone's requirements, and second, PVP losses never result in experience: debt, though you'll still suffer normal penalties if: you're killed by wandering mobs within the PVP

stealthy stalkers can perform high-damage opening? Pareas, COM players who don't own COV can still enter PVP zones, though the latter is mandatory for participation in consensual supergroup base raids, which comprise the other major element of COV's, PVP experience.

Supergroup bases have loads of decomitive and functional options, which players may purchase using prestige (COV's supergroup currency). Bases come in several themes and may be upgraded with: items like teleporters (for faster travel) and turrets (for kicking ass). Base upkeep gets pretty pricey, though—you can expect to secrifice lots of infamy. (COV's personal currency, equivalent to COH's influence rewards) in exchange for prestige once you hit higher levels.

Though bases may be costly, COV is anything. but; current COH subscribers can add the gameto their accounts at no additional monthly charge. If seasoned players want to create and raid supargroup bases at pary tier slightly rathment villan archetypes, then City of Villains offers a decent deal, and new players who are just beginning their reign of tenor will find a lot to like. Elther way villainy isn't too bad. / Denice Cook

EVIL LITTLE TRICKS



Comment of the second of the s





केंद्र र प्रश्लेष्ट र जिल्लाम



Fun...but you'll forget which side you're on until the police drones zap you.



VERDICT ***



WHAT IS THE MATRIX? AT THIS POINT, the kung fu training dite a punch line. Nevertheless, two lacklus endure those silly motor film sequels and two equally execrable, make self-referential games (Enter the Matrix and The Matrix Online) like a videogame!" Ar later, we're surprised to find that The Matrix: Patri resembles a fun one, of Neo puts forth a competent effort.

Rather than trying to break storytelling barriers, PON sticks to brawler basics—at which it excels. Punch, kick, and strike your favorite Keanu poses, while controlling the messianic hacker's exploits; really, the game plays like a Cliffs Notes version of the movie trilogy. The difference: PON takes many liberties with the script, giving us some new takes on memorable scenes and fleshing out areas seen only briefly in the films, such as

the kung fu training dojo, Just be prepared to endure those slily moments when characters' make self-referential groaners about how "this is like a videogeme!" And in some ways, PON even

The mouse-driven combat gameplay provides one of the biggest surprises, since it's so set-isfyingly easy to pick up. Combination attacks: and timing-based mouse clicks certainly make you feel like "The One" early on; however, that's where the fun ends and the glitches begin.

Navigating your way to those gool moments can get painful. Camera angles flip between a fixed position and a mouse-look alming mode, which will have you heaving in short order. Fifteen minutes into the game, the stuttering camera views sent me into fits as I ran down staircases, fending off security guards. And the graphics...I never thought I'd see anything more wooden and flat than Keanu's acting, but thanks to the forced salmations (Neo's either at a dead stop or a mad sprint, with no in-between) and dated, pastyfaced textures, I stand corrected.

This isn't a tarrible game. On the contrary,

Path of Neo is the best Matrix game to date. Talk

about keeping expectations low.

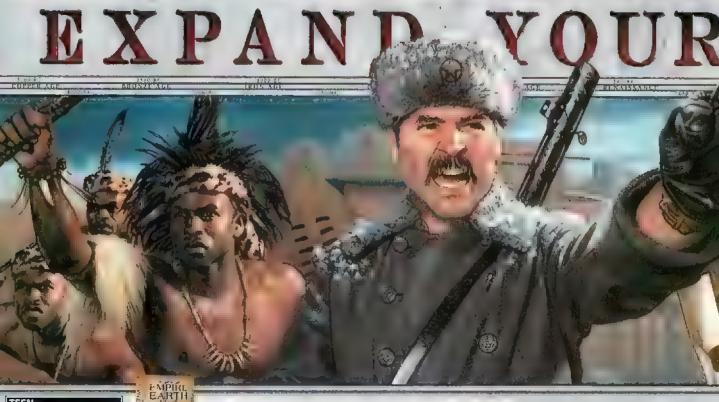
/ Darren Gladstone

Decent but dated, this is best for the tile-hard Matrix fans who still believe.





THIS BASIC BRAWLER PLAYS LIKE A CLIFFS NOTES VERSION OF THE MOVIE TRILOGY.





94%

"The new king of real-time strategy."

—PC Gamer, Editor's Choice
June 2005





ETARSHIP SCORPIONS? By another clame. TROOFERS

Bugs, sir, millions of them!

POR NEAR, Empire Interactive Move. Of the Strengette St

TROOPERS TAKE NOTE: THIS HERE shooter's based less on the good-guys as-bad-guys blockbuster than the "profitability" of its Starship name. And where the movie sends up sci-fi cliche, the software seems sincere about sticking to clunky shooter convention. And it isn't ironic. Not on purpose.

Buggy, it bills itself with the tag line "Bugs, sir, millions of themi" How long before these SUV-sized space insects bug out, sticking themselves in scenery and stopping or inclines because bad programming can't take them where their lancet legs should? Maybe minutes. On the other hand, you see the tinsel-tawdry graphics the second you start the game (imagine a modern-day movie with stopframe and miniature shots sharing the summer with CG showcases...and not winking once).

strategies to master (0.31)

Institution of the control of the same of the sam

The wrinkled, aluminum-wrapped places, the melted mannequin people, the whittled-from-wood objects—all screwy, all the same.

What you do in and with them is worse. Escort that engineer to three terminals, trooper!" And so the engineer rushes through the ants' nest faster than you can follow, asking "Are they near?" as they assessingte him. "Escort general so and so to safety, soldier!": Same story with him—and when his game is: over, man, your game is over, too. "Help hold? down the fort!" But the department-store dummies on your side stand still at their turrets, not shooting as the bugs bust in. Sometimes: they talk, though...making it more obvious with each word that somewhere, someone: shoved every warm body in the building into a sound studio and said, "Tell 'em who's boss!" And they tried./Shawn Killott



∸.iiwipe…er tribute te ged-awful G.I. dee teysf

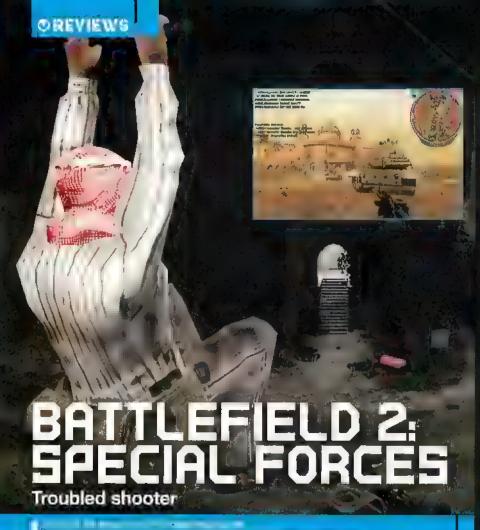
A by-the-numbers blast-a-thon.



VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

SUPREMACY





SEARS SHOOLER ESTS RATING T REQUIRED: 1.7 GHz GPU, S12MB RAM, 3QS hard drive space, 128MB videocard, Safflefield 2 FECOMMENDED: 1GB RAM AS I DELAYSE Internet. LAM 1255A SIANSES

IF SPITEFUL FOLK ARE BATTLEFIELD
2's major malfunction, expansion pack Special Forces encourages 'em' to cause more mayhem. Flashbang friend-lies—biling and stupid is funny. When one tries to take your helo, hit him with a hand-held hangover; the bird will either flop over or sputter about and smack something tall. Tear gas works, too. Good-for-nothings can gag buddles and blanket bases. No administration of the second statement of th

Sarcasm aside, even the new transportation—fast but fragile four-wheelers, skidoos, and civilian pickups and care—prove the point. Scrape anything sturdler—say your team's tank—and boom: The team kill counts against whomever you hit. Punishing the "goof up" (by pressing Page Down) brings him nearer to being banned, and on it goes until playing pranks goes from "nono" to "why not?" and even the straightest shooters turn Pvt. Pyle (and we're talking the Full Metal Jacket variety). Oh, and here's another one: Once you've used your own grappling hook, you can crib another guy's... while he's climbing.

HELL AND A HARD PLACE

That's one in three rounds; the rest are rough in their own way. Sightless and shell—shooked—if it isn't your side, it's the other—and if not them, then the ink-black battlefield itself. Night isn't natural; it's painted on in all-or-nothing patches, meaning you'll play the entire thing through pea green goggles...or not. Maxing your monitor's brightness turnshight into day, which makes whining about being sniped in the dark neither here nor there for those in the know (i.e., everyone but EA).

And that's just it: if you live by the long-range shot, this is the one you've been waiting for. With go-anywhere grappling hooks and zip lines, lone wolves (in this case, sniper and assault classes) can set up camp among the many cranes, towers, and rooftops and will pack the tent only to relocate or restock. Finding someone with an ammo-supplying support kit, however, is another story...and engineers, who get none of the new goodies, are almost nonexistent. We say: more reason to have added an objective mode (à la the stellar Battlefield 1942? Secret Weapons of WWII expansion) that puts a premium on all kits./Shawn Elliott



△ Sounds good at first: #F2's 1.12 patch adds unlockable Special Forces weapons to the original game. But not so fust—that also includes the flashbeings that come with the F2000 rifle, which are bed in Special Forces, and new regular #F2's runways pop and spark as greedy players throw granades at friendlies write fighting for planes.



When doing damage in the seat of a Hind or Apache attack chopper, you're the hand of Ged. Otherwise, you're between hell and a kard place



FRAMERATE FIX

Sick of stuttering frames and slide-show performance? First, find the VideoDefault con the in your C:\Program Fires\EA GAMES\Battlefield Z\mods\bf2\Settings directory. Once there, open VideoDefault. con in Notepad and change rendered silowAllRefreshRetes 0 to rendered silowAllRefreshRetes 1. Finally, select Save.

FIVE OTHER FLAWS

- Battlefield 2's already long load times get even werse. Ditto for the postloading data verification process
- Poor tramerates and other performence problems—even on high-sed PCs
- The prelimitalisation patch requires 3GP of free hard drive space and a second download demands applier 290MH.
- A Single-player made supports only six of Special Forces' eight maps, and only at the 16-player scale:
- 5 Shoody integration with Bettlefield 2, means you must out to the deaktop and restart in order to play regular maps.

A few patches from fun.



VERDICT
★★☆☆☆

EVEN THE STRAIGHTEST SHOOTERS
TURN PVT. PYLE (AND WE'RE TALKING
THE FULL METAL JACKET VARIETY).





IMER & SICK

2GHz CPU, 512MB PAM. (2BME videocard MULTELAYER Rone

Over & out

This guy just yet his second kill eversince It's the last scanarie, he just gained seven levels. Now that's game design!



They still haven't fixed the exgine's pathfinding...se my guys are stuck on these cope for eternity. Or until I change their path.

PROCESSO: 10Hz CPU, 256MB RAM, SGB hard sirke type

YOU KNOW WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT 🗵 Hammer & Sickle? Nothing. And that's a huge letdown, since the game builds! off of developer Nival Interactive's stellar ::: Silent Storm. Somehow the same designers. using the same basic game engine and the same basic game mechanics, have managed

MORT, NOT SWEET

least it ends quickly. Very quickly.

And that sums up H&S's chief undoing: You can blow through its six levels in a handful of hours. The game isn't necessarily bad; on the contrary, the missions are frequently enjoyable. since the strategic gameplay still offers some fairly rich challenges. But H&S's brevity complately sabotages whatever hope it harbored of hitting anything resembling a stride.

Taking place just after WWII, H&S basically sticks to the Silent Storm formula, casting you this time as a Russian spy working undercover in Germany to stave off a nuclear holocaust. You get a huge, RPG-style assortment of skill upgrades with which to customize your character as he levels up, and throughout the game, you acquire aquadmates who can be similarly: developed and commanded in the turnbased, third-person tactical combat...sort of. Teammates come and go rather abruptly; as a result, you never grow attached to: the characters, never really get to develop

ithem, and never get to experiment with different strategies since you're so limited by available aquad members, It's a far ory from the wealth of options and characters Slient, Storm offered....

RUSH JOE

to create a profoundly unsatisfying game. At win fact, the whole game screams "incompiete." You have a large in-game campaign: map, but most of it never gets filled in. The story gets vomited out in incoherent chunks. splashing bits and pleces of gooey plot: : points in the hope that something sticks and adds to the experience. The Silent Storm game engine—which seemed to run better in earlier games—chokes when you try to trade: Items between characters, and grinds painfully at other times. The biggest indication that H&S was rushed comes in the incredibly anticlimactic final scenario as your squaddies level up with virtually every bullet fired, taking all characters from a modest midgame state 🧋 to full power right before the end of this—the sixth—scenario. 🛶 🕞 🖘

Considering the game's pedigree, the designers, and so on, it's hard to think of this unfinished, ragged, Ill-conceived game: as anything less than a major disappoint- a ment. One question remains: Which Nivalinteractive is in charge of the upcoming Heroes of Might and Magic V...the brilliant Silent Storm Nival, or the hacks behind, Hammer & Sickle? / Robert Coffey.



SILENT STORM: GOLD EDITION

Silent Storm delivered an overwhelming ckage of goods; a solid RPG system ambitious game engine that rendered he game world as one big destructible le with bigger, more demonstred map: nd the sci-il elements in the endgame ow you can get it in a convenient Gold iui Hammer & Sickle—is the game to ga , you went staller tactical gaming

A total rush job, from start to all-toosudden finish.





ITS BREVITY COMPLETELY SABOTAGES WHATEVER HOPE IT HARBORED OF HITTING ANYTHING RESEMBLING A STRIDE.



DECISION GAMES IS HARD AT work on a new edition of Computer War in Europe (www.decision-games.com). Like its predecessor, which was released in 1998, it won't include any A.I. (it's strictly PBEM), but a lot of things about the game, including the interface, will be revamped and improved. If the game sees decent sales numbers, Decision will develop an A.I. module, so those dying to play this old monster game solo still have hopo.

Speaking of A.I., how about a PC version of the Advanced Squad Leader board game with solo play against a computer opponent? More details next month!



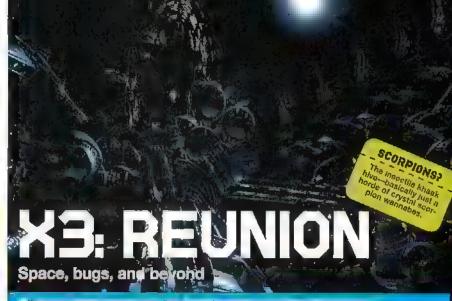
ANGLO-GERMAN WAR '39-'45

FOR MANY YEARS, SCHWERPUNKT Games has continued to publish what I cell "digital board games." Schwerpunkt's latest release, Anglo-German War '39-'45, covers the whole of WWII in Western Europe and provides a good choice for gamers who yearn to make meaningful decisions as they used to with paper-and-cardboard war games. The combat results table is clearly displayed, combat factors are unambiguous, and each move makes a difference. The game sports a functional (though click-heavy and somewhat crude) interface and passable A.I. For war gamers who long for the best things about board games to be effectively preserved on PCs, developer Ron Dockal's games come about as crose as it gets. You can order Anglo-German War exclusively from Schwerpunkt's website (www.ghg.net/ schwerpt) for \$50, shipping included. / Bruce Geryk (For more wer-gam-

ing geekery, visit Bruce at grognards.1UP.com)

Very narrow appeal, but still well done.





IF X2: THE THREAT IS A COLORFUL circus of interstellar space-aim love, X3:
Reunion seems like a blank, inscrutable sequel, initially, cruising its coldly glowing jump gates and glinting shader-kissed spaceports astonishes; the sense of grandness the game conveys is like clutching grass in a field, gazing skyward, and imagining yourself hurled off the face of the Earth.

Yet back to Earth it plummets, a junkyard mess of bugs riddled with egregious gameplay, blunders that threaten to twist your cheerful disposition (and X3's framorate) into something, like Dick Cheney snarling in slow-mo. Grashes on sector entry, a hieroglyphic HUD, dead-end, missions, menu bars you can't scroll with a mouse...what the heck happened here?

Follow a rebaked "hunt allens, allens bed!" story (a dot better than the Wing Commander: movie's) or beat your own path to fame—X3 excuses its trite nametive by encouraging you to ignore it altogether. Plunder are asteroids. or lay slege to traders, pimp out your scout. ship or bulk up a jumbo corvette with fighter! bays...even own a factory and monopolize: the market. Like its predecessors, X3 flaunts free-form ambition like the Donald. But-stop me if you've heard this one—the game is maddeningly more "shoot" than "aim." Atmosphere: blankets planets, space stations gleam like enormous starlit erector sets, and as a result, framerates tally like Midwest winter lows. And that's on a high-end rig; low-enders will get. better results with a flipbook of Babylon 5.

Features prove unreliable in general: The manual's hotkey commands are dead wrong, and the dynamic economy—chock-full of hundreds of goods—skews toward demand over supply so that prices appear to climb based on need instead of actual stock. Huh? The latest patch fixes much (easily an extra star's worth of gameplay), but with an updated readme that states "cut-acenes reproduced, redirected,

and optimized." X3 has holiday rush job written.
all over it.

Even deloused, X3 fits a hardest-of-the-hardoore mold. If you found Freelancer too complex, ball now. But Elite fans might just uncover enough to keep playing, lumps and all. Developer Egosoft seems dead set on fixing what's wrong, so it comes down to whether patience is a virtue...or a \$40 cop out.

/ Matt Peckham



X3 semetimes morphs into a derivative enrails abouter during scripted story missions.



A Capturing ether skips requires the accessional suit up and space walk. Cooling

The ultimate space or bug simulation—you pick.

GAVING WORLD

VERDIC'I'



EVEN DELOUSED, X3 FITS A HARD-EST-OF-THE-HARDCORE MOLD

n kespa things exciting:



SOMEONE FORGOT TO TELL THE DEVELopers of King Kong that games based on movies are supposed to suck. What presumably began life in an executive marketing meeting—alongeide discussions of King Kong Happy Meals, King Kong action figures, and King Kong edible underwear—unexpectedly emerges as a solid, thoroughly enjoyable action-adventure. By streamlining the experience for a nongeming "mainstream" crowd, the developers deliver a fresh, visceral game that's better than many of the "hardcore" titles released this year.

King Kong-err, sorry-Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie puts you in the role of Jack Driscoll (voiced by Kong actor) Adrian Brody), the screenwriter who accompanies ambitious filmmaker Carl Denham (Jack Black reprises his role) and his crew to mysterious Skull Island to shoot a motion picture. And if you don't know the rest, you should spend less time gaming and more time watching old movies.

I haven't seen Peter Jackson's Kong movie yet, so ! can't tell you how it compares-but ! can tell you that it hardly matters. This game completely stands on its own, making for a. • tense, well-paced thrill ride with elements of first-person shooters and survival-horror games, with some rudimentary puzzle solving thrown in. The gorgeously rendered Skull Island treats you to dense jungles, foreboding mountaintops, and a host of awesomely: designed greatures. The sound effects and music contribute immensely to the atmosphere, with a quiet tension during the more exploratory sections...that crescendes during; moments of high action. Everything works your nerves just like—hey, whaddyk knowlgood, scary movie.

MEY, WHERE'S MY HEALTH SART

King Kong's strong immersion owes much to the total lack of a traditional HUD-no health bars, no inventory, no ammo counter-leaving the screen completely devoted to the game world. Even your weapon remains unseen until you press the spacebar to raise it. While this design decision was made so that nongamers wouldn't feel intimidated by unfamiliar genre conventions ("Hey, what's that red bar?"), it works surprisingly well for those used to and fond of those conventions. Pressing the spacebar to raise my weapon. struck me as odd at first-but by game's end, it fait more natural and immersive to me than running around with my gun pointed all the time.

And for a game that's quite easy most of the time, it never stops being fun. Though you can litentity never veer off the linear path the designers have laid out for you, you can often find multiple ways to tackle whatever challenges you encounter. Do you use your few precious bullets to taken

out that dinosaur, or do you find apears to chuck at him? Maybe, instead, you light a spear on fireand then burn the brush he's in, frying him alive. Or, finally, you could spear a smaller creature fike: a bet or worm) as bait, and then shoot the dino white he's busy eating. Most hardcore shooters: don't have half this level of variety.

And then there's that big spe. At key moments, when the gameplay switches to that of a third-person, consolelike fighting game, you get to play as Kong himself. I had a miserable time with these sections controlwise...until I gave up on the mouse/keyboard and plugged in my new Xbox 360 USB con-. troller, and then it was a blast-especially in the game's final segment in New York, where, Kong really gets out his urban angst.

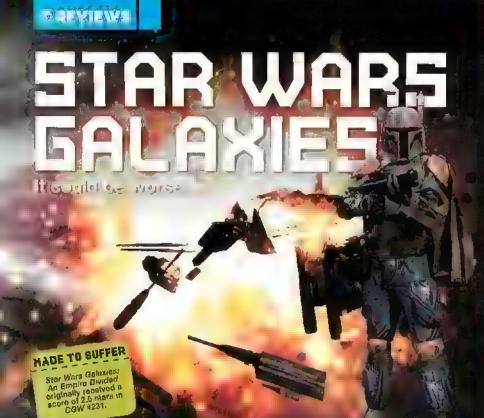
Some gamers may balk at King Kong's linearity and short length (eight hours at most). And I'm in agreement with other a curmudgeons who tire of seeing every freaking movie turned into a game these days. But this one's the exception: it's a smart, expertly made little thriller. Don't betoo snobby to pick it up./Jeff Green

Short but sweet—and you get to be a giant gorilla.



VERDICT ***

KONG'S STRONG IMMERSION OWES MUCH TO THE TOTAL LACK OF A TRADITIONAL HUD.



AS A LONGTIME STAR WARS GALAXIES player, I'm used to developer Sony Online Entertainment breaking the game the way a cross-eyed Gungan in a china shop breaks dishes. What I'm not used to, though, is hearing SOE cop to past mistakes and promise to. finally get things right...which brings us to the recent, unprecedented SWG revemp. In fact,

these sweeping changes are substantial enough to warrant an equally unprecedented rereview of the game that took CGW's 2003 Coaster of the Year crown.

At least SOE started with the right premise:
A great MMORPG experience did exist within SWG, but too many arcane gameplay elements obstructed players from really discovering it.
Unfortunately, instead of making that great experience more obvious and accessible, SOE tossed everything—including the good parte—into the garbage chute, wholly replacing it with a dreadful set of new game enhancements that actually make things much, much worse.

INTO THE GARBAGE CHUTE, PLYBOY

Most of the new quests—designed to add story; content and guide new players through the game—flat-out don't work as of this writing. SWG certainly needs this type of content, but when waypoints lead nowhere and NPCs don't update their dialogue (or even acknowledge the fact that you have a quest queued up), you're left feeling.

YOU'RE LEFT
FEELING QUITE
CHEATED BY THESE SOCALLED ENHANCEMENTS

quite cheated by these so-called enhancements.

Veteran players will also feel cheated by the bland class selection, which replaces SWG's deep and versatile skill system with nine "iconic" professions based on various Star Wars movie personas. SOE says that players want SWG to feel more "Star Wars-y," but if anything, this class system makes your character feel less personal and more limited. Couldn't SOE just present the old skill system less cryptically, without completely supplanting it?

Also wholly replaced is the HUD, which now consists of an action-oriented, FP5-style setup, that turns combat into a game of whack-amole as you struggle to keep your blaster reticule on target. SOE bills this as "cool" and "exciting," and if you could lock on to your target, it might be entertaining. As is, it's merely, boring and frustrating.

WHAT AN INCREDIBLE SMELL

What stinks more than anything is SOE's treatment of the game's devoted fans, who find themselves spurned by the developer's hope that a dumbed-down gaming experience will appeal to a wider audience. Prior to this update, SWG was a novel, if somewhat impenetrable, MMO in several ways, most notably its style of virtual freedom. But no more, as SOE has now chosen to make the game just like every other generic leveling treadmill. / Matthew Chase.

it's worse.



VERDICT ★★☆☆☆☆



Many smaller changes kurt the SWG community worst of all. The removal of battle folique leaves entertainers dencing to empty rooms, since ne are needs to rest after a hard day of fighting.



As part of the new SWG Starter Kit bex, the entire Jump to Lightspeed expansion is now a free patch, and thankfully, it remains just ac good as before.



 Since SCE removed all death penalties, committing sulcide is now the most convenient way to travel.



i kept haping this was one of the developers.

SOE HATES YOU

SWG vets really got the shart with this update, i first logged in to find all my old weapons—which had originally cost melli fortune—listed as "disabled." Shopping for new ones resulted in nothing but bugged vendors with bugged firserms...and since the new quests cater to lower levels, literally tacked anything to do

Disgusted, I used one of my 10 free respectokens (provided to all veteral observators) to become a Jedi, only to discover that my default quest for a lightsaber wouldn't even start. Sadly, everything cool about the now-common Jedi class—at one time the pinnacle of SWG schievement—got neutered, and congume Jedi players have nothing to show for their hard work except a couple of marginally more powerful items.



GENERATIONS OF READERS HAVE. halled Jules Verne as the founding father of science fiction, and his works portray a world filled with the enterprising spirit of the 19th century and a faspination with scientific progress and incredble inventions. Unfortunately, our love affair. with these classics has led to computer games. We all can't be Jules Verne...but his hasn't deterred developer Frogwares rom picking up the gauntlet and exploiting he lack of copyright protection.

Verne's original story features the puncual Philess Fogg, who bet his fellow club nembers that he could travel around the world in 80 days. Frogwares, in a fit of nubris, decided to replace Fogg with the developer's own Oliver Lavisheart charicter (a Brad Pitt wannabe if we've ever seen one), who accepts the same proposiion from his eccentric uncle in order to escape an arranged marriage. Along the way, he runs into numerous references to Jules Verne's novel while exploring Cairo, Sombay, Yokohama, and San Francisco.

Exciting as that may sound, 80 Days: litimately fails to do anything we haven't: ilready seen in an adventure game. rogwares certainly breaks no new ground n the puzzle department: You get your ever puzzles, your color-matching puzzles, your find-the-hot-spot puzzles, your thisnakes-no-freaking-sense puzzles, and---my avorite-your find-four-men-in-kilts-forclues-to-find-your-goal puzzle. You also get stuck with an annoying save-point system and a built-in timer—if he doesn't est. Oliver passes out from fetigue, which shaves precious hours off your clock.

80 DAYS ULTI-MATELY FAILS TO DO ANYTHING WE HAVENT ALREADY SEEN

When you're not racing through predictable braintensers, you'll find some delightful locales to admire. By way of example, you don't just end up in Bombay—you're in Bollywood, with real Bollywood movie posters to giggle at, and with wind and weather effects adding to the atmosphere.

#O Days is no classic by any means, but : die-hard adventure gamers will find joy in exploring the beautifully rendered cities. and locales, even while following an arrow on a compass to the next puzzle in need of selving.**/Stephen Gehringer**



What genna sue first-DiCaprio or PAIT



Grand Theft Autor Cairot

A whirlwind global tour for diehards... and a bumpy ride for everyone else.



VERDICT **



Bachelor's Degree Programs in Game Development & Computer Animation



school of

Computer Animation

Digital Arts & Design

Entertainment Business

Elles

Game Development

Recording Arts

Show Production & Touring

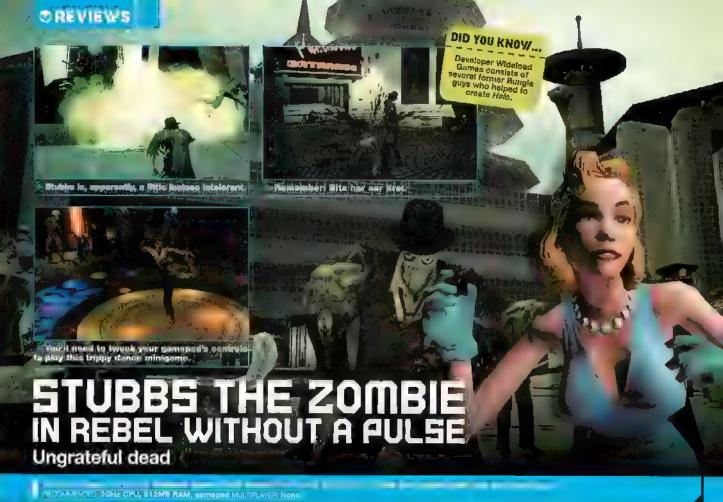
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Assume a form that the contribution of the Said Said Actives.



IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN, OR

moldy. Or...well, dead. Novertheless, it's fun as hell to play as Stubbs the Zomble in: the world's first third-person brain-eating simulator. Just don't blink—the game returns to the grave way before its time.

The genius behind Stubbs stems from its simple, twisted premise: Chow down on the living to survive. Eventually you can create noxious clouds, turn your own pancreas into a projectile grenade, bowl with your head, or vank; off your arm and use it to possess the living. Your "ammo," if you can call it that, is a healthy. supply of zombles—created by nibbling on yummy bystander cranium. Those brains must be high in calcium or something. The best part of it: Your next victim could soon become your next ally. After you kill someone, watch him rise: to join you...then, like an undead Patton, lead your army into battle, or just treat your undead soldiers like meat shields and shove them in harm's way...

WACK TO THE PUTURE

The fictitious 1950s town of tomorrow, Punchbowl, provides a kitschy backdrop to Stubbs' absurdity—and the game's nonstop tongue-in-cheek humor charmingly underacores the ridiculousness of encouraging the player to snack on fresh brains, Some genuinaly laugh-out-loud moments pop up...some: subtle (two robot workers ponder why they'restanding around a water cooler), and some not so subtle (a Michael Jackson-like dance-off with the police chief).

Stubbs' quirky aesthetic complements its overall vibe. Considering that this game's foundation comes from a modified version of the Halo engine, the shambling animations of the undead (watch for the legless zombies) that need to drag themselves) and the oddball pseudo-futuristic atyle come across as unique. You certainly won't confuse this for any of the typical overdone, normal-mapped, hyperrealistic style of the day.

Audio doesn't get neglected, either. Beyond the somewhat repetitive dialogue (while clever, you can hear the same last words of dying civilians only so many times), keep your ears: peeled for cries, shrieks, and even the occasional hilariously over-the-top chomping sound. of a zomble pigging out. Stubbs has a killersoundtrack, too-in fact, I went out and actually paid money for the CD, which contains: eight songs not in the game.

But the biggest gripe and probably the biggest compliment I can give: I wanted more. Stubbs ends entirely too soon, with a six to eight hour experience that leaves you desperately craving more brains. Of course, you can artificially it

extend the life of the game by making your ownfun-try zombifying every human on each level. Stubbs also possesses an uncanny knack for getting lost (the undead must have a crappy sense of direction or something), as it's sometimes unclear where you're supposed to sharnble next. Note to developer: Extending game length with frustrating gameplay = bad.

DEAD CAN'T DANCE

Beyond the short length, Stubbs suffers from a chronic case of Xbox-port syndrome, and the symptoms become particularly evident in the game's controls. The keyboard and mouse seem easy enough to handle at first; however, as the game introduces new modes of attack, like the head roll, suddenly you have too many button clusters to get a handle on. May we suggest Microsoft's wired Xbox 360 controller?

And what's with the total lack of co-op play? The PC version of Halo suffered the same fate-is it that tough to code go-op into the Halo engine? A good multiplayer mode could easily extend the short afterlife of Stubbs! single-player adventure. Imagine a mode that pits player-controlled zombies against playercontrolled humans. At least we can dream.

Fortunately, all this doesn't stop Stubbs from being lots of twisted fun. We just want more of it./Darren Gladstone...

Good, but we crave more. MORE BRAINS!





THE GENIUS BEHIND STUBBS STEMS FROM ITS SIMPLE TWISTED PREMISE CHOW DOWN ON THE LIVING TO SURVIVE



World-class gaming obsession

SINCE BRANCHING OFF FROM THE Eidos-published Championship Manager series in 2003, developer Sports Interactive's Worldwide Soccer Manager franchise has enjoyed a healthy existence under new publisher Sega. At this point, WSM pretty much rules the "footle sim" genre. Nothing can really compete with WSM:---2006—except maybe the previous year's verlion of the same game.

At this point, you might expect a discussion? of this version's new features and how they nake a great game even better. But do they? Sure, you can now give your team a halftime pep talk and even speak to individual players about their performances. But how many new features can you load into a product like this before you start obscuring its core gameplay? This series sorely needs a real tutorial; the information you can get on each screen by hitting F1—although billed by Sports Interactive as the: 'tutorial" everyone wante-ien't one.

The heart of this game lies in making tran-

fers and devising match tactics...and both could be explained more clearly to new players. Some people would argue that the whole point of the game is to figure out how things. work; that makes some sense, but the truth, of the matter is that this series long since transformed from a game into a full-fledged obsession. Nothing in the 2006 version does. anything to diminish the stellar reputation of the series-the only question is whether you really want to take the plunge. If you've already done so, then you probably haven't even bothered to read this far. If you're new to the world of sports-management sims...do you really want to surrender a large ohunk of $_{
m f}$ your life? Think carefully. / Bruce Geryk

So far ahead, you can't see the competition.



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GEEKED AT BIRTH.



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NOTHING IN THE 2006 VERSION DIMINISHES THE STELLAR REPUTATION OF THE SERIES.





Fierce raceyou can tell by the camers angle.



Pirat one there gots to budger the semi



• Ge into the light! And that cop's fender!

I'M HAVING HEART PALPITATIONS.

Seriously. And since I recently reduced my caffeine intake, unless the guy at the coffee shop slipped a mickey into my decaf latte, something about Most Wanted-much like Need for Speed Underground 2 (to which I gave a 4.5 Editor's Choice score)—gets me hot 'n' bothered.

it's safe to say that "something" is neither the game's story nor its acting, though both Improve: on NFSU2's embarrassments. Cut-scenes get rendered in FMV-a throwback, but better than NFSU2's cheap-o comic strips, Supermodel Josia: Maran is this iteration's smokin-hot (but dangerous!) girl, and her voice acting (if not her cup size) beats out Brooke Burke's. The story remains goofy: Bad guy Razor monkeys with your prized ride and then makes off with it after you're caught: by the fuzz. Now you're making your way up "the: blacklist," beating other underground racers ones. at a time until you reach Rezor himself...

NO STOP SIGNS, NO SPEED LIMIT

You complete a preset number of missions before: challenging each blacklisted racer, and while you can find missions by free-roaming the city, I usually went to my "safe house" and jumped directly. to a mission—an improvement over NFSU2's wander-till-you-find-stuff-to-do setup. Missions: include races of the usual lik-circuit, drag, and sprint—and "milestones" that get me all jittery

grins because they usher in the biggest difference: between this game and NFSU2: wicked-ass, shotof-adrenaline fun cop chases.

In their simplicity—outrun X number of police cars, do X dollars worth of demage, engage the po-po in a chase leating X amount of time—the cop chases deliver some of the most fun I've hadgaming in a while. Realistic police chatter peppers. the background sound, and these cops do not fear the respor—they smuch into you; they form: roadblocks; they throw down metal spikes. It's intense and exciting in a spontaneous-shouting,: teeth-gritting kind of way. I only wish the cops didn't sometimes come to their senses midpursuit and speed off in the other direction.

Two new tools help you avoid arrest: Speed breakers let you briefly slow time to help you perform intricate evasive maneuvers, and pursuit: breakers scattered throughout the world create and environmental damage that stops the police car immediately behind you, usually by smashing it : under a structure you've just knocked over. Doing this damage raises your ride's "heat" level, and if it. gets hot enough, you'll need to leave it in the garage or you're almost guaranteed a trip downtown. as soon as you pull into the street.

NOBODY'S GONNA SLOW ME DOWN

Getting caught means parting with some of your mission-reward bounty to get yourself and your

ride out of the clink, Rewards also appear in the form of markers whenever you beat a blacklist racer. Each blacklist race yields five unlabeled markers; you choose two and win whatever is behind them, from dough, to "get out of jail free" cards, to the pink slip for your rival's car. It makes winning those races even more exciting, knowing that if luck is on your side, you could walk away with a whole new ride right after your very first. blackfist race—which I did.

The possibility for rewards early and often keeps things compelling even when the races stop being so. You can only increase the difficulty level of a circuit race in so many ways before you just make it out-and-out hard, and NFSMW eventually. approaches that line between "challenging but accessible" and "so frustrating that you want to: break comething."

Gearheads may enjoy the bevy of car modifications, but for me, driving games are about driving, and I generally disdain anything that cuts into my time doing so. Does Most Wanted feed my adrenatine addiction from start to finish? No-repetition, while unavoidable in a game like this, ultimately does in the game's ability to raise your blood pressure. But while it lasts...damn, it's good. / Kristen Salvatore

If enjoying malicious mischief is a orime, then slap the cuffs on me.



VERDICT ***

IT'S INTENSE AND EXCITING IN A SPONTANEOUS. SHOUTING, TEETH-GRITTING KIND OF WAY.

VIETCONG 2

Just another Vietnam shooter

P C F F F

pame-crashing bugs will. Unlike its predecessors, Vietcong 2 suffers from massive bettle fatigue in almost every mission-critical category. Foremost on this inept supply list: invulnerable enemy A.I. that absorb body shots like Superman; a yawner of a story line prinkled with corny, Leave it to Beaver-meets-sot. Rock dialogue; and a clunky, listless game: engine that turns the Vietcong franchise into cannon fodder. When the smoke clears, VC2 provides about as much value as an officer who goes AWOL midfirefight.

I thoroughly enjoyed the original Vietcong and its Fist Alpha expansion; though rough at times, these games offer plenty of intrigue and enough groundbreaking action to keep you moving through Vietnam's mountain rivers and rice paddies. Conversely, VC2's story—which centers on the infamous 1968 Tet offensive—isn't all it can be. You might expect an intense, battle-heavy.

backdrop, but VC2 gets bogged down by lengthy cut-scenes that slow gameplay and do very little for the story. Worse, you spend more time dollecting weapons than actually shooting those peaky and near-invincible pajama-clad VC. Not only do you lose these weapons after each level, but they leave a lot to be desired: Unless you're toting a sniper rifle, head shots rarely get results, and explosives have an extremely limited area of effect. In one case, I lobbed a granade inside a small room with six VC unfriendlies but managed only a single kill. Lame!

VC2's multiplayer modes provide its only ray of light, with several game types, including some fun co-op missions. A quasi-Counter-Strike scoring system, wherein a successful shooter earns points and eventually unlocks eight special character classes such as machine gunner, medic, and commando, partially makes up for the disappointingly inept single-player game.

/ Rephasi Liberatore



 Peer tacties can only earn your character a fresh body bag.



Head shote wen't get you for in this game.

Frag the devs.







"Save the where." See—yeu're a good guy!



- I'm ridin' out to EB to pick up the new Jekamon. See you boys tates.



Developer Neversoft (of Tony Hawk fame) crafts a dark, violent, better-than-average story of a cowboy with a mysterious past (that's you) out to avenge his father's death. Excellent voice work by a stellar cast (including—impressively enough—Kris Kristofferson, who starred in director Sam Peckinpah's classic Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid helps things along.

Gun certainly tries hard, but its console roots

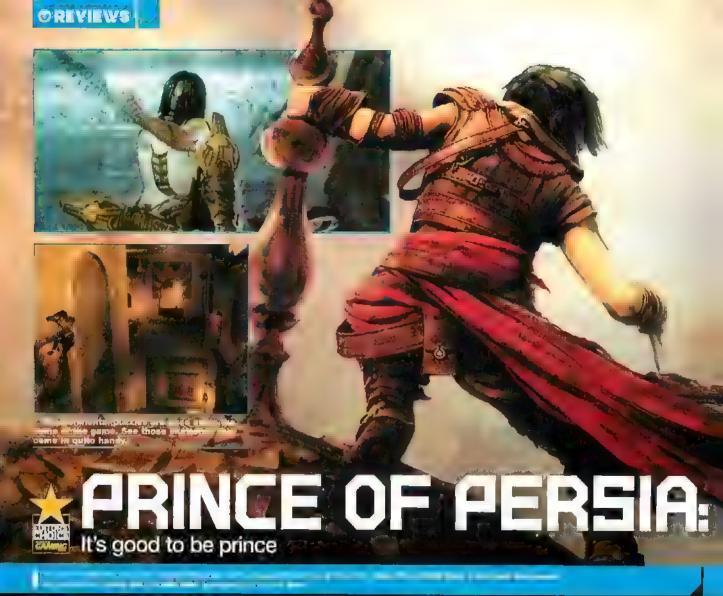
will kill it for some PC gamers. Controls are fuzzy, and the overforgiving targeting, combined with weak enemy A.I., makes it nearly impossible to miss. The game is also extremely easy. Even if you do all the side missions (the ranching missions get particularly fun), you can still breeze through this entire game in something like 10 hours. The graphics, too, suffer from console-itis, with blocky characters often "skating" on the surface or getting stupidly trapped in bad collision detection.

But still...the last good cowboy game was LucasArts' Outlaws, way back in 1997. So who's griping? You get to do plenty of horse back riding, the "quick draw" shooting nurtures your inner Clint Eastwood, and there shi't one danged allen or Nazi in sight. Yee-haw.

Yay! A cowboy shooter! Only a commie rat fink wouldn't be happy.







FANS OF THE PRINCE OF PERSIA SERIES were understandably confused and perhaps somewhat angered last year, After, :Ubisoft successfully reinvented the reveredfranchise in 2003 with the sublime The Sands of Time (CGW's 2003 Action Game of the Year), it nearly killed the resulting good vibes with the follow-up, 2004's Warrior Within. Their titular Prince turned from a heroic adventurer caught up in an entertaining whiriwind quest: to-quite simply—a pompous jerk, complete with a bloodthirsty attitude and accompanying out-of-place hard-rock riffs. Thanks to some great core exploration and combat gameplayalways a series hallmark—his adventure was one still well worth taking...though we understandably approached Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones, the final entry in this three-game. arc, with reservations.

DIAMONDS AND PEARLS

it's with much relief, then, that Thrones delivers on many levels, correcting plenty of the;

previous games' shortcomings and actually making Warrior Within a better product in the process—quite a feat, but more on that later. Most notably, with its third POP game in three years, Ubisoft finally nailed the balance between environmental puzzles and combat. This owes partial thanks to speed kills—a new combat technique that has you sneaking up on: ematic, minigame-exque sequence (which will). sometimes frustratingly crop out your dagger, which provides your main signal for knowing when to strike). If you succeed, you get the kill. sometimes of multiple enemies. Miss a beat, and the enemy blocks your attack, sending you? back to the love-it-or-hate-it, combo-heavy regular combat. Because you come acrossispeed-kill opportunities frequently, you can choose to skip many of the drawn-out battlesprovided you achieve success with the executions, naturally.

This streamlined combat leaves more time for what many would argue should always remain.

the game's focus: the environmental puzzles, in addition to the gymnastic repertoire the Prince iuses to navigate each challenge—including walf-running, leaping, shimmying up poles, and the now-second-nature time powers (rewind, slow-mo, etc.)-Thrones features a particularly useful addition that opens the world up even more: stabbable wall plates, which you can use an enemy and hitting the attack button in a cin- as midwell leaping or running points. One of the thrills of the series has always been entering a. new area, surveying the scens—the enemies, pillars, traps, vaulting bars, and curtains—and then formulating a path through it all. This addition (and, to a leaser extent, the new springboardlike wall shutters and Sam Fisher-esque tight-squeeze shimmy technique) presents even more possibilities...

DIRTY MIND

All this action takes place in the Prince's wonderfully varied home of Babylon, where you'll work your way from the atreets to the rooftops, from a fortress to tunnels, from the hanging gar-



THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM USED SOME REAL FORETHOUGHT WHEN CREATING THIS TRILOGY. FROM A PLOT-DEVELOPMENT STANDPOINT, THINK OF IT AS THE ANTI-STAR WARS.



prisperting this ginermous statue across rayal workshop is a rayal pain in the ass.



A Returning from The Sands of Time is Farrah. Que oute, sexually tense banton







in case the name doesn't give it away, the Dark Prince sin't the piecet guy in the warid.

THE TWO THRONES

dens to the royal workshop. All that confusingbacktracking from Warrior Within: gone. And that jerk from fast year we mentioned earlier? Well, he's back...but in a different context. In Thrones, all of the Prince's bad habits manifest themselves in the Dark Prince—a doppelgänger formed by an infection from the magical Sands. of Time—who the Prince unwillingly transforms. into on occasion. Oddly, a constantly depleting. life bar (blamed on him being part sand creature) gives the Dark Prince sections a sense of not necessarily appreciated urgency, as he must kill to replenish his sand power while he quickly. navigates the environment.

The two characters spend the game fighting for control of the Prince's body, as well as his mind-a battle that plays out through: clever back-and-forth internal dialogue. As the Prince begins to realize he's been fighting for selfish, revenge-driven reasons, he once again becomes the endearing character. from The Sands of Time...and it's about this time that you realize Warrior Within had a far. deeper meaning behind its more controversial changes. More specifically, this elaborate setup shows that the development team used some real forethought when creating this: trilogy, planting seeds and setting events in motion that would result in Thrones' delicious payoff, including an ending that will likely have you popping The Sands of Time back in. From A a plot-development standpoint, think of it as... the enti-Star Wars...

CHAOS AND DISORDER

As with any great game, though, Thrones' problems sting just a little more. Why, for instance, can you no longer drink from any water source; to replenish your health, as you could in the previous games? The only places to recharge: are the appredically dispersed save-game water fountains. You better believe this gets frustrating when facing multiple puzzle rooms, a Dark Prince stint, and even a miniboss battle between rest stops--especially if you hit the occasional crash bug or slight graphical hiccup. Also, while most of the puzzles prove satisfyingly challenging, a couple of the largest ones? quickly turn frustrating thanks to some tedious. back-and-forth mechanics. And seeing as how -: this is the third POP adventure in the past 24. months, some gamers may just be burned out: on the series. But for most, Thrones' excellent. pacing, amouth controls (provided you use a dual-analog gemepad), and epic feel easily make it the jewel of the trilogy—and one of the year's best action games.

/ Gray Ford



NEW WAYS TO PLAY

A fitting and polished end to a great trilogy.



VERDIC'I' ***



DUNGEONDOOM

The second secon

FIXING FOR MORE DOOM 3?

DungeonDoom may be your poison if you're up for Diablo without the melodrama, arty goth o levels, or Blizzardy finesse.

Cobble together a random level/creature generator, four RPG professions, gun-humping carnage insanity, and presto—out pops this humble 50MB Doom 3 mod. Whether it's clever enough to trip your download trigger is another question.

Snap in the single mod directory, launch the batch file, and you're on. Topside, you pick a human (average), andorian (brain), or orc (tank), then roll a fighter, psi-fighter, supernatural, or cardmaster. The first three classes pinball between weapons and mana (spell or ability) proficiencies, while the final one is—bizarre as it sounds—fights via a card game.

A card-wuh-huh? Arguably worth trying for this bit of inspiration alone, the cardmaster builds a "deck" of abilities at the shop before entering a random, multileveled dungeon. Instead of popping bad guys (consisting of renamed Doom 3 spawn) with bullets or spells, the cardmaster draws cards. Health, mana, a dozen shotgun rounds, a spell or two...you never know what's coming next. It's just funky

enough to keep the half-baked corridor-crawling semiprovocative

But these corridors are the very essence of blah—just a few tunnels and dead ends jammed together between start and exit. Whack enough helispawn and the next level pops open. Whether you gin up a dungeon with 20 or the full-monty 100, it's a trenz ed meat grind from top to bottom, with stops every 10 (increasingly pitiless) levels to replenish your goods. If you actually make it to level 100, do let us (or Guinness) know.

Monster pop-ins snag the gameplay by Invading your personal space with unwanted frends—run away and some just teleport back up close. In other words, you'd better enjoy being the unfortunate bloke at the bottom of a football pile-on. One other warning: The price of admissions includes Raven Software's Resurrection of Evil expansion. If you don't own it, the cost of DungeonDoom spikes 20 bucks.

Still, it's hard to argue with free, and the mod is a sort of curio in progress. Whether you give it a shot or not, it's worth bookmarking just to see what it looks like six months out

/Matt Peckham



 Entrances and exits from a level are blocked intil you defeat the required number of monsters.



A Uh, D'sal, you look a little purple. Monaters are Doom 3's redux with tweaked names and colors.

Creative...but unbalanced and monotonous.







SMOD

CREDIT JAPANESE-MADE SMOD THIS: The over-the-top weapons it adds to Half-Life 2 outdo the shooter's already original arsenal. Noteworthy geogaws include:

- A UMD-shooting Sony PSP
- A lambda-topped wand with lethal pixle dust
- A banana bomb à la the Worms strategy senes
- A fast-swinging shovel
- A WWII-era bort-action rifle with fixed bayonet
- Ricocheting scissors
- Miniature antlions that grow into full-sized maneaters when thrown
- Modern-day assault and scoped sniper rifles

...all professionally assembled and fully functional. Such widgets should make Mr. Freeman's mission toss daunting (and they do), so Smod brings in more baddles to up the ante. Still, chaos and superpowers trump challenge, and the thing also introduces serviceable F.E.A.R.-style slow-mo, along with a solid kick to the chops that good guy Gordon can combine with his trusty crowbar. Oh, and eating fallen foes-man or animat-restores stamina./Shawn Eillott

It-came-from-Japan craziness







Hopofully It's launching copies of the Snoop Dogg's Puff Puff Pass Your UMD.









This is not the patch you're looking for.





AGE OF EMPIRES III V1.02 PATCH

THE VERSION 1.02 PATCH FOR ENSEMBLE managing battles in the pre-1.02 game, have Studios' Age of Empires III isn't much of an upgrade. Some players will be glad

to see that a handful of networking issues get addressed, and others might enjoy the supersized maps, which provide more room to boom in the Carolinas, the Great Plains, Saguenay, Sonora, and Texas (sadly, we don't get any bigger naval maps...it sure would be nice if ships had more space to swing their prows). A lot of players might even appreciate the new hotkey screen in the options menu, ,but although you can customize your hotkeys, this feature comes with some strange limitations and a number of important commands still missing.

Certain unit stances, which were useful for

gone missing. Also newly absent: the ability to Issue your units an "attack move" order, during which they will stop to fight when they come in range of an enemy. Odd, since these kinds of commands often play a crucial role in how a real-time strategy game plays...and this patch removes them. You can restore these attack moves by manually editing a certain text file, but Ensemble warns players against it, citing "known issues" with attack moves-a feature that the developer no longer officially supports.

Age of Empires III was only one patch away from greatness. Not only is this is not that patch, but it actually moves Ensemble's ATS even farther away from that goal. / Tom Chick



AGE OF EMPIRES III WAS ONLY ONE PATCH AWAY FROM GREATNESS.

UFO. AFTERSHOCK

Running out of words that begin with "after"





in the larger battles, the autopeuse function bloks in more often than a decemente cambier,



This cuitlet walked around the corner and sworld of pain.

2003'S UFO: AFTERMATH WAS AN ambitious small-squad factical combat game that suffered from bugs and a lack of user-friendliness. This year's sequely UFO: Aftershock is...en ambitious small-squad tactical combat game that suffers from bugs and a lack of user-friendliness. OK, Aftershock might be slightly friendlier, but don't expect anything groundbreaking—or even ground-bruising.

Both games share the same game engine, the same visual motif, and the same backstory, and both get divvied up into two gameplay venues: the strategic portion, where you build bases, train troops, and perform research; and the tactical portion, where you actually go out and kick some allen ass. The tactical engine hybridizes real-time and turn-based gameplay pausing at various intervals so that you can issue orders to your troops. This system seems like a clever way to appeal to a wider FTS fambase, but it suffers from some poor implementation. First, the autopause is touchier than an overcaffeinated kieptomaniae. Spot an enemy, the game pauses. Shoot an enemy: pause

Get hit: pause. Like the previous sentences, a little of this staccato gameplay goes a long way. Additionally, your soldiers will not do anything unless you specifically order them to. I'm extremely fond of micromanagement, but even don't enjoy endiessly clicking on the same slavering mutant horror three feet away so that my guys will actually shoot it.

Aftershock developer Alter Interactive deserves to be pilloried for its shoody QA. Despite its predecessor having suffered critical ridicule due to excessive bugginess, Aftershock/crashed often, showcased some major graphical errors, and stopped working altogether if I set the refresh rate to match my desktop's. A rather unfortunate situation, because when it's working, Aftershock has so much love to give.

A solid X-Com clone, tailor-made for grognards and entomologists.





SPACE HACK

Twenty-dollar Diablo®

WHEN A PUBLISHER SENDS US A GAME along with a cover letter that states, "Please be gentle. We know that the game doesn't break new ground with regards to graphics or gemeplay mechanics..." It creates some understandably low expectations for the title in question. And, in fact, Space Hack, a by-the-numbers action-RPG, breaks no new ground—in graphica, gameplay, or any other area. It is, however, surprisingly fun to play.

From the moment the game begins, you know exactly what to do because you've done it all before: develop your fighting skills, strength, and dexterity; hack through an ever-growing number of ever more challenging foes in sewers, swamps, and forests; and then trade your loot for a collection of increasingly deadly weapons. Yes, Space Hack is Diablo nine years after that game first appeared, but it's also \$20, which makes the game's shortcomings—an occasionally wonky camera and a glaring lack of multiplayer—seem trivial. What makes Space Hack so engaging is its simplicity: You can just jumpright in; you don't need a state-of-the-art processor, \$300 videocard, or gamepad to play. In

fact, you can complete this surprisingly addictive game using only your mouse.

In spite of Space Hack's bare-bones design, the developers managed to include a few nice touches that show the team put more into this game than one would expect from a budget title. Some of my favorites: a remarkably disgusting squishing sound as you walk through the alien "ova" you hack through for loot, and an entertaining and wide variety of nightmarish beetles, ravenous shrimp, and other nasty alien bugs to defeat.

Though myrlad developers swear up and down that their titles will "revolutionize gaming," Space Hack's creator, Rebelmind, does something much more valuable in actually following through on what it promises: a game that, while not cutting-edge, is simply fun to play.

Tem Edwards.

A great game for the money.

COMPUTER GANING VERDICT



You can't make a phat lewt emelette without breaking a few atles eva.



Even on easy, the game presents a sometimes overwhelming number of enemies.

REMINI

What should you play today? Nameu in take indicate Editors Choice games

SAME ************************************	ISSUE .	RATING
Act of War: Direct Action	June 05	Ministrative:
Advent Rising	Nov 05	Well-Well-Siz
Agatha Christie: And Then There Were None	Jan 06	水水水水流
Aeriai Striko	June 05	Addition:
Age of Empires III	Dec 05	nienienienienie
Area 51	Sept 05	नेतर्गर्न िवर
The Bard's Tale	Oct 05	****
Basebali Mogul 2006	July-Aug 05	AAA47
Battle of Britain III Wings of Victory	Der Q5	***
Dattlefield 2	Sept 05	****
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Blitzkrieg 2	Dec 05	###G
BloodRayne 2	Oct 05	素を表しかり
Bone: Out From Boneville	Dec 05	大大大市市
Brothers in Arms; Earned in Blood	Occ 05	****
Brothern in Amner Rend to Hdl 30	June 05	kkkki:
Gall of Duty 2	Jan 08	WINE !
Gly(llxation IV	Jun 06	****
Close Combat: First to Fight	July/Aug 05	indicate.
Codonamo: Panzers— Phase Two	Nov 05	richtel de
Combati Task Force 121	July/Aug 05	**
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars	July/Aug 08	*******
Crown of Glory: Europe in the Age of Napaleon	Oct 05	political sus
Dangerous Waters	June 05	対対対抗に
Darwinia .	Dec 05	****
Day of Defeat: Source	Dec 05	
Diplomacy	Dec 05	+
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Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	July/Aug 05	本本本市
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Dragonshard	Dec 05	MONORALE .
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GAME	ISSUE - 3	FIATME
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ER	Oct 05	##HOD
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Fantastic 4	Sept 05	*##okir
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FlatOut	Sep 05	नेत्रेत्रेत्रे कं
Gary Grigsby's World at War	June 05	**************************************
Grand Theft Auto: San Andress	Sept 05	****
GTR FIA Racing	Oct 05	shikakidoli:
Gulld Wars	July/Aug 05	kikiki r
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Lego Star Wars	July/Aug 05	Addidele
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Project: Snowblind	July/Aug 05	****
Psychonauts	June 05	*****
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Quake 4	Jan 96	*AAA
Rag Doll Kung Fu	Jan 86	***

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The Movies

GAME	BEUE	- Train seas
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Second Sight	July/Aug 05	***
Serious Sam (I	Dec 05	****
Shattered Union	Jan 06	****
Silent Hunter III	June 05	****
The Sims 2: Nightlife	Dec 05	****
The Sims 2: University	May 05	ARARA
Sniper Elite	Jan 06	水水水坑。
Splinter Cell Chaos Theory	June 05	****
Star Wars Buttlefront II	Jan 06	****
Stronghold 2	Sept 05	****
Supremacy	July/Aug 05	Hittorian
SWAT 4	June 05	****
T-72: Balkans on Fire!	Oct 05	****
Tin Soldiers: Julius Coesar	Sept 05	संस्था
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	Dec 05	****
Total Overdose	Jan 06	*****
TrackMania Sunrise	Sept 05	AAAA S
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War—Winter Assault	Dac 05	****
WinSPMBT	Nov 05	*A holes
World Championship Tennis	July/Aug 05	****
World Soccer Winning At Bleven 8 International	Jy/Aug 05	***



▲ Call of Duty 2



Dell's new XPS is a workstation in gamer's clothing

NVIDIA WOULD LOVE IT IF EVERYONE bought a system with two graphics cards, but how realistic is that? Weil, if Dell adopts a technology, you can usually assume that it's become mainstream. Usually, The XPS 600 is anything but ordinary. This beefy system is the only one in Deil's stable to offer SLI for the time being. But does Dell's top gaming machine have enough muscle to justify the \$4,000 asking price for just the bare system?

Cosmetically, the XPS 600 looks just ike the XPS Gan 5: same backlit shield, same funky flip-out door on the front panel. Forget surface appearances, though—look under the hood. Opening the clamshell case, you'lt see the XPS 600 looks much like a Dei system—only more cluttered. According to Deil, the double-wide cooling solution is for reducing noise, not heat. Certainly, this is one of the quieter systems we've used—no mean feat considering the huge thermal output when the dual 7800 GTX graphics cards and 3.80GHz Pentium 4 processor are running full bore. Yes, because it's a Dell, the XPS 600 uses an Intel processor, not an Athlon 64.

The Pentium 4 670 processor is notable for the amount of heat it can generate, even with support for Intel's Enhanced Speedstep power management. Deliuses a pair of sideways-mounted fans in a cooling duct, similar to a BTX-style arrangement. The fans exhaust air out the back of the case and generate relatively little noise. The fans pull air over a finned tower heat-pipe passive cooler.

Keeping the GPUs cool without generating noise is another challenge. Even given the generous size of the chassis, the area around the paired 7800 GTX cards is pretty tight. In addition to the GPU cooling fans pushing air out the back of the case, a 92mm fan mounted on the side of the case pulls air from the GPUs and vents it out the front and rear of the case.

The graphics cards themselves vary a bit from the 7800 GTX reference designs we've seen from Nvidia. The fan is larger, for one, and the cooling duct and heat pipe assembly is bulky and takes up the slot space adjacent to each card.

SLI-CE OF LIFE

The real feature that distinguishes the Dell SLI from existing systems on the market is the use of what Nvidia is calling nForce4 SLI X16. It's pretty much the same layout used in AMO Opteron-based workstations using Nvidia's nForce4 Professional core logic. In truth, the XPS 600 is really a high-end consumer workstation in disguise. Still, when it comes to gaming performance, that lack of Athlon 64 horsepower hurts the XPS in the long run. The Alhlon 64 GPU remains the clear choice for most gamers performancewise.

While Dell was first out of the gate, nForce4 SLI X16 now supports AMD's processors as well as Intel's, so AMD enthusiasts aren't left out in the cold.

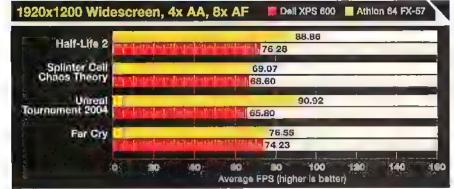
OWN

EXTREME TECH

Players

Tech Medics
This month:
Graphics card questions
wait a sec! We got a question
about LCD panels? Holy crap!
You better check this out.

GAME TESTS





AT HIGHER RESOLUTIONS, THE XPS 600 FARED BETTER IN GRAPHICALLY DEMANDING TITLES.

That also means that prices for the older mother-boards—let's call them nForce4 SLI X8 for ciarity's sake—will be dropping a bit. Now buyers will have a full range of SLI solutions available. An upcoming driver release will even enable SLI for mainstream GeForce 6600 cards that don't have the small SLI connector on the top of the card. Instead, data transfers will be handled exclusively over PCF Express. Given the lesser capabilities and bandwidth of the 6600, this shouldn't be an issue.

Even with this advantage, it's really not a contest, with a couple of interesting exceptions. In our Splinter Cell Chaos Theory tests, which use HOR lighting and Shader Model 3.0. at the lowest resolution, the 3.80GHz P4-equipped XPS 600 was easily outpaced by the Athlon 64 FX-57 system. But when we moved to 1600x1200 and widescreen modes, it was nearly a dead heat. The dual-GPU cards were working pretty hard here, keeping up with the demands of the game and the game appeared to be graphics-bound at these high resolutions. Similarly, the results were pretty close for Far Cry and Doom 3 in highly demanding widescreen benchmarks.

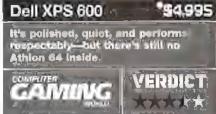
The XPS 600 did close the gap a bit at the higher resolutions in general but performed better in the more graphically demanding titles, while trailing in the more CPU-bound games, as you might expect

MORE FOR THE MONEY

Our review system shipped with some other goodies, including a dual-layer DVD recorder, a DVD-ROM drive, CAS 5-5-5 DDR667 memory, and a pair of Hitachi 7K500 hard drives set up as a terabyte RAID 0 array, Del also equips the XPS 600 with a 650-watt power supply mounted in the bottom of the chassis so that there's planty of juice to spare.

Rounding out the \$5,000 package we received were Logitech's 5.1 Z-5500 speaker kit and Dell's 24-inch UltraSharp 2405FPW widescreen display. With a native resolution of 1920x1200 pixels (16:10 aspect ratio), this monitor makes up for the system's linck of dual-display support. When you run games that support widescreen mode on this display, you almost have to crane your neck to see the screen's edges. Even without the monitor and speakers, the XPS 600 is probably close to \$4,000. That's a lot of pocket change for a system that's ull mately slower than much of the competition.

The XPS does offer a degree of polish that's often lacking in boutique game systems. In addition, it's astonishingly quiet, despite the enormous thermal stress haide the case. If you are really looking for a system that you can just set up and start playing out of the box, then the Dell XPS 600 is worth a took. Dell's engineering team cortainly did some superbidesign work around the chassis and in its implementation of a non-Intel desktop chipset. However, you should also consider other systems based on AMD processor solutions before making your final choice. / Loyd Case



'(System + Louduch 5.1 Z-5500 speakers + 24-inch LCD display



Extra Help

There's one unguantification per a management reviews that usually gets left out; customel support. Even if you're commonable with cracking open a case, it's always good to know them as moone on pall to help the support.

theology that wants, we work the product of the consideration in reviews, and in passe. If the consideration in reviews, and in passe. If the consideration in reviews, and in passe. If the consideration is the consideration of the considera

with its XPS line, Delt offers what it calls a conclusion-level" relationship with declipated accordings. Eveny companies we starting to do this, such as Allenware with its ALX line, and Widow PC. Dell's designated XPS supports into a most to be more of a rapid response queue that's available 24/7 (and God Willing, not outsourced to some place in first Yemen). Dell'apokes people say that the support team is XPS trained and consists of industry, cartifely necessarias according.

A Tale of Two Dells

Not all Deli systems are created equal. That kind of comes with the territory when you can custom-build a PC to spec. White performing specific tests for the Media Center OS, we had a second XPS 600 in house. This was the machine we networked with an Xbox 360 (in this month's Gladeloned), and it came fairly similarly stacked, with a couple sotable exceptions:

- Overclockable 3.2GHz Intel Extreme Edition processor
- Two 80GB 10K drives for the QS, and one 500GB SATA2 drive for date.
- Sound Blaster X-Fi card

For more on how the tests with this ng worked out, check out this month's Gladstoned column on page 44.

WETTER IS BETTER

Aquian ICM-505+CPU cooler kit: a radiator in your PC

AIR COOLING MAY SUFFICE FOR AN OLD VW, but when you're generating serious power and heat, wetter is better. In particular, when we place higher demands on our PC hardware with overclocking, effective cooling can mean the difference between a fast CPU and a broken one. The Koolance compact water-cooling system contains all the ingredients to get you started with CPU liquid cooling, It even sounds an alarm if the liquid temperature reaches 55 degrees Celajus (or another temperature of your determination), and if the temperature continues to rise to 3 degrees above the alarm setting, the system shuts itself down to prevent damage.

The Koolance's alum num radiator mounts to your case's 120mm rear fan port via a straightforward installation process; the user manual is packed with illustrations and accompanying instructions to guide you through each step. Koolance recommends replacing the coolant every two years and includes enough fluid in the original package for two or three changes (assuming you manage not to spill most of it like we did). The system we looked at includes just the CPU cooler, but additional coolers

oan be added for dual-processor configurations, multiple hard drives (RAID), and GPU applications. The included LED display, from which you can monitor live temperature sensor readings and adjust the alarm and shutdown settings, mounts in a front-accessible 3.5-inch drive bay or 5.25-Inoh drive bay with an adapter (not included). Ten manual fan-speed settings range from quiet to DustBuster-level volume; you can also leave the device on automatic and let the current temperature sensor value dictate fan intensity.

The Koolance system's price point, while still high, actually fills a niche between the cheaper and louder fen/heat-sink combos and the überexpensive phase-change cooling systems that are overkill for the majority of us. / Victor Loh

Aguian ICM-505+CPU \$220

High entry cost, but increased performance and reliability could justify the price.





A quick glance at the front-mounting panel tells how coal it is under the head.

XBOX 360 CONTROLLER FOR WINDOWS

Microsoft has perfected the PC gamepad—with a console controller

YOU'LL HAVE TO PRY THE KEYBOARD and mouse from my cold, dead fingers. Still, there's one undeniable truth: For all the good those peripherals do in first-person shooters, some games simply require a gamepad. Enter the Xbox 360 control er is it for a consore? is it for a PC? It's for both.

If you have an Xbox 360, you already own this gamepad and can simply plug it into your PC's USB port when needed. If you don't have a 360 but are in the market for a gamepad for your PC, look no further. This is the best-designed gamepad to date-console or otherwise.

Falling somewhere between a PS2 DualShock and a slimmed-down Xbox Type S controller. the 360 gamepad is solidly built and feels great in your hands. The buttons are well spaced and responsive. The analog sticks are rubberized and rugged. Someone would have to be really pissed at a game and very determined to broak this controller. Moreover, if you have the 360 headset (or any cell-phone headset with a 2.5mm jack) you can chat with buddles in games that support it.

So why the four-star review and not a glowing Editors' Choice award? A few minor points need addressing before the score can go any

higher, Issue one: the oute little Guide button on the controller. On the 360, it calls up a main menu interface. Here, it does squat. How about letting it launch a button-config applet in Windows? Anything would be nicet Smart money says it'll work with Vista to open a "My Games" folder

Issue two: Currently, only the wired Xbox 360 controllers work on the PC. It also won't recognize the Plug and Charge wireless adapter kit, and there is no wireless dongle for PC users (arthough Microsoft reps assure us that it's coming).

Forget arguments that this will lead to the "dumbening" of PC gaming. Even die-hard mouse-and-keyboard advocates have to confess that some games, like Madden or platforming titles like Psychonauts, play a whole lot better with a gamepad. And considering that developers will start coding to support this pad, having a controller that can serve double duty on the Xbox. 360 and the PC is just smart. If only it didn't cost twice as much as the previous standard-bearer, Logitech's Dual Action controller, it'd be perfect for non-360-owners as well, / Darren Gladstone



Xbox 360 Controller

Say hello to your new gamepad

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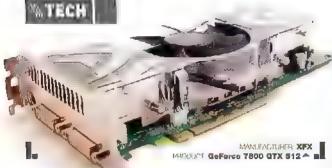
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FORCE-FULL

With a card this big, someone's compensating

nanometer chip. The original 7800 GTX has a standard core clock speed of 430MHz and GDDR3 memory at

600MHz (1200MHz effective). This new 512MB model boosts the core clock by about 28 percent, to 550MHz, and shoots up the memory clock a whopping 42 percent, to 860MHz (1700MHz effective). This requires the most monstrous standard cooling solution we've ever seen. The 7800 GTX 512 moves the series from a single-slot to a dual-slot design, sporting a massive cooling array that covers almost the entire length of the card in thin aluminum fins and heat cross, with a large 80mm fan in the center. This isn't a card; it's a freaking Death Star, It's also a little no sier, but still not as loud as the X1800 XT

In 3DMark05 synthetic benchmark testing, this 512MB card runs about 10 percent faster than the Radeon X1800 XT. In most real-world game tests, you see similarly impressive resurts. F.E.A.R., for example, is a system-requirement monster with all its graphical effects. Thanks to the dramatically increased clock speeds, Nvidia has managed to pull well ahead with no AA or AF, and runs 13

percent to 20 percent ahead when you turn those features on.

Frankly, though, we have no idea what's going on with Call of Duty 2. We tested and retested, and the results are repeatable. ATI's fastest card is between 30 percent and 40 percent faster than even XFX's tweaked 7800 GTX 512. From what we could see, ATI was rendering everything correctly, so there didn't appear to be any shortcuts or bugs. Still, you'll notice a huge speedup moving from the 7800 GTX to the new 512 model, particularly with AA and AF applied.

The real bitter pill to swallow is the price. Is \$650 for a graphics card too much? \$400 used to be outrageous. Then it was \$500. The Radeon. X1800 XT (if you can find one in stock) goes for \$599. Basically if you have to ask about the price. this isn't a card for you. / Jason Cross

XFX 7800 GTX 512 Another month, another new "fastest card on the block." Yay! 3DMark05 Score: 9829—a new high!

IT NEVER GETS OLD, declaring a new graphics card king every other issue. Last up, it was ATI. The Radeon X1800 XT kicked the crap out of Nvidia's GeForce 7800 GTX-especially with antialiasing and

anisotropic filtering enabled, Except when running Doom 3, ATI's new speed demon often ran-15 to 20 percent faster than Nyidia's card. Rest assured, if you wait long enough (in this case, a whole month), there will be yet another, even more expensive card pushing the limits.

Nvidia's response: the GeForce 7800 GTX 512. In addition to increasing the 7800's speed from 256MB to 512MB. Nyidia included a new cooling. solution that enables these chips to achieve nosebleed-inducing clock speeds. We just don't know which is scarier; the speeds or the price.

At its heart, the GeForce 7800 GTX 512 is just a GeForce 7800 GTX. It's the exact same 110-

THE ONLY BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW IS THE \$650 PRICE TAG.

POWER AND MOBILITY

Does the Nvidia GeForce Go 7800 GTX deliver?

PC COMPANIES HAVE BEEN TOUTING large laptops as "dosktop replacements" for years, but these systems almost always offer substantial compromises in the name of mobility. That gap is finally closing, especially in the GPU department: Nvidia's Go 7800 GTX is assentially the same GPU as the one used in the company's desktop cards.

Can a mobile 7800 GTX deliver 3D gaming nirvana? We took one for a spin in a Dell XPS M170 laptop, also equipped with a Pentium M 770 running at 2.13GHz; 2GB of RAM; a 100GB, 7200 rpm hard drive; and a 17-inch widescreen display. We decided to compare the Go 7800 GTX's performance with that of a desktop 7800 GTX in a Shuttle SD11G5, which uses the same 915 mobile chipset as the Dell laptop. We also equipped the Shuttle with a Pentium M 770 running at 2.13GHz.

We tested each machine with 3DMark05 and a host of current-generation games. We also ran DVD playback using PowerDVD, with herdware acceleration on and off, to see how much difference using the 7800 GTX's built-in video acceleration engine would make.

The differences in 3DMark05 performance are in the range of 12 percent to 13 percentabout what you'd expect given the core and

memory clock differences. and a demonstration that the mobile part is tracking very nicely given the clock-rate disparity.

Current-generation games are finally starting to push the graphics-technology envelope, so in tests like EE A.R. and Sorious Sam II, even a leading desktop GPU like the 7800 GTX starts to

falter when you crank up resolution, antialiasing, and anisotropic filtering. On the mobile system, framerates dip below 40fps in F.E.A.R. at 1024x768 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on. Splinter Cell Chaos Theory also hits the GPU pretty hard when AA and AF are turned on, although since it's a "sneaking" game rather than a last action game, high framerates are probably less essential. But the laptop running the Go 7800 GTX at slightly reduced clock rates has no problems with Far Cry.

We also took a quick look at DVD playback performance by running the lobby firefight from The Matrix while monitoring CPU usage In Windows Task Manager's performance windows. The Dell XPS is not something you'll run on batteries very often, and it's uncertain just

14 1 KMURER Neidia m → Jul . GeForce Go 7800 GTX 🌣

what the trade-off is in terms of battery life when using CPU versus GPU for DVD playback. But it is true that using the Go 7800 GTX's hardware video engine when playing DVD movies cuts CPU utilization nearly in half.

The GeForce Go 7800 GTX is pretty much the fastest mobile GPU out there, though you're not likely to find it in thin and light notebooks. And as we've seen with the Dell XPS, you also won't find it in budget notebooks. Note that core and memory clocks will vary among different notebook PCs. But if you do have a need for a laptop with a fast GPU for LAN parties or just 3D gaming on the go, then the GeForce Go 7800 GTX is as fast as it gets. /Loyd Case



Q: I have a three-and-a-half-year-old Gateway with a 2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB of Rambus RAM, and a Radeon 9600 graphics card. It's still a pretty good machine but starting to show its age, particularly with new games. I'm somewhat limited in upgrading because of the motherboard, so I'm wondering what I can do at this point for a performance boost. Or would a new CPU and motherboard be throwing money down the drain?

Mike Hardy

A: Well, I wouldn't go so far as to call a new motherboard and CPU "money down the drain," but getting a system that old up-to-date is going to be more work than you realize. For starters, a system that old probably doesn't have a power supply powerful enough to handle modern CPUs and videocards, and it probably doesn't have the necessary plugs for a modern motherboard. So you need a new power supply. Then there's the RAM-Rambus RAM hasn't been used on Pentium 4s in ages, so you need to upgrade to DDR2 RAM, or DDR400 if you get an Athlon 64. All the good new motherboards are for PCI Express (PCIe) graphics cards, and that's really what you want because you want a nice new graphics card to replace that Radeon 9600. The whole point of all this is to let your computer play new games well, right? OK, so that's a new graphics card.

Are you starting to see the bigger picture? With the exception of your drives and case, you pretty much will end up getting a whole new computer (and then you'll realize that your drives are old and slow, holding you back). It's possible to find an older mother-board that supports RDRAM and a slightly faster, years-old Pentium 4 to plug into it, but you won't see much benefit from that,

and you'll be stuck with an older midrange AGP graphics card that is struggling with current games already. As much as I hate to be the bearer of bad news, we don't buy computers, we rant them, and it looks like your Gateway's number is up. Take solace in the fact that three and a half years is a good long run.

Q: I'm preparing my wish list for my own killer rig. I'm in Iraq at the moment, so I've got a while to do research on how I'm going to squander my savings when I get back. I've always had CRTs and never ventured into the LCD arena. I've noticed that LCDs always mention native resolution, which indicates the optimum display size for that screen. In the past, my CRT monitor's ability usually exceeded my videocard's ability; native resolution issues never really came up. However, I'm planning to get a system with dual Nvidia 7800 GTXes. Typically, a 19-inch LCD has a native resolution of 1280x1024. Does the display quality suffer when you try to crank it above the native resolution? If it does, doesn't that leave a lot of unused capacity for the 7800s?

Jim Charette

A: The short answer is yes, an LCD with a native resolution of 1280x1024 would hold you back with dual 7800 GTXs. Native resolution of an LCD has nothing to do with the optimum "size" of the display in the way we think of a CRT monitor and resolution. LCDs are not analog devices that take a signal and shoot electron beams and phosphors in scan lines, where better electronics can extract more resolution from the analog input signal and display more resolution. Instead, they have an exact number of discrete pixels, each made up of a red, green,

and blue cell. An LCD with a resolution of 1280x1024 has exactly that many pixels, no more and no less, no matter what image you try to display on it.

LCD monitors have a circuit inside called a scaler that will take your input signal and stretch it to fill the screen, but it's always stretching whatever input you have to 1280x1024 pixels, in your example. Dual 7800 GTX cards are capable of running most games at 1600x1200, usually with features like antialiasing and anisotropic filtering enabled. You definitely want a nice high-res LCD. The good news is, you can find great 20-inch LCD monitors with 1600x1200 native resolution, and widescreen LCD monitors with even better resolution, for \$500 or less if you shop around online. It'll be cheaper than your two videocards, and it'll take longer to become obsolete, too.

Q: I recently bought Civ 4, and my old GeForce FX 5200 Ultra just isn't going to cut it. I'm thinking of upgrading to a 6600 GT or a 6800; which would be a better choice if I'm aiming to spend somewhere between \$150 and \$250?

Nicholas Racz

A: If you're looking for an AGP card, you're probably better off getting a GeForce 6800. If you can spring for the 6800 GT (it's maybe \$50 more), get that instead; it's a significant upgrade. If you have PCI Express, the best deal in the price range you're looking at is the new GeForce 6800 GS. It's priced like the 6600 GT and performs tike the 6800 GT.

Got questions? Send them to: Tech_Medics@zilldemi.com



IOM vs. BRUCE



THEY SAY HISTORY IS WRITTEN BY the victors. Then again, they say all kinds of dumb stuff, so this month, history will be written by Tom and Bruce, who will explain why the English are renowned for their fine cursine and why UCP is one of the world's leading schools.

To reprise their roles from the Conquests expansion for Civilization III, played in CGW's May 2004 issue, Tom will be England's Queen Elizabeth and Bruce will be Spain's Queen Isabella. They'll be playing on a small terra map, which means they and three A.I. players will begin together on one continent with a resource-laden New World somewhere across the sea.

TOM, 4000 B.C.: It all began with some English settlers dorking around in a cluster of spice fields way back in 4000 B.C. All that spice would do them no good until they got around to inventing calendars, so after a quick tap of the B key—these settlers were fond of hotkeys—London was founded. Except that it was quickly renamed Tomopolis in honor of its ruler, who is represented by a cartoony avatar of a superhot redheaded English chick. In about 6,000 years, she'll be played by Cate Blanchett in the movie Elizabeth. Bruce's character, on the other hand, will be played by Faye Dunaway in a TV miniseries called Christopher Columbus. Draw your own conclusions

BRUCE, 4000 B.C.: Every now and then when his AD&D buddies get grounded or have too much homework, Tom stops getting his

role-playing fix and his need to elf-pretend starts spilling over into this column. When the game is something like World of WarCraft, that roleplaying actually gets you more experience points. In Civ IV, it just makes you end up with cities named Tomopolis. I'm going to use the default Spanish naming scheme, because when Spain takes over the world, I don't want to be ruling from the capital of Bruceville. Would you?

TOM, 3600 B.C.; The Mongols are next door to me—there goes the neighborhood! Fortunately, it's Kublai and not Gerighis who's dropped by, so I'm hoping for "pleasure domes decread" as opposed to riding out of the steppes to rape and pillage

BRUCE, 3600 B.C.: While Tom expands h.s roleplaying to encompass allusions to Coleridge, I'm researching meditation. One of the cool things about Civ IV is that founding a religion can be of

significant benefit to you later on, and Spain has an advantage in starting with mysticism: It means that I am almost assured of founding Buddhism because I already have the prerequisite for it.

TOM: 2000 B.C.: The only thing more pathelic.

TOM, 2000 B.C.: The only thing more pathetic than Mongols without horses (a problem that is not afflicting my neighbors) is England without a navy (a problem that is afflicting me). So in the interest of founding an institution that will one day be notable for rum, sodomy, and the lash, I push east to found a coastal city. It is called Chick Port. I was forced to found it farther south than I would have liked, since the Mongois beat me to the choicer spot with fish and pigs, but Chick Port does have a pair of silver mines that will provide the English with lovely forks, jewelry, and antiwere-wolf ammo.

BRUCE, 2000 B.C.: There actually aren't any werewolves in this game, but Tom's ail excited



▲ Tom's Suddhist missionary prepares to convert, and then eat, the people of Seville.



Ah, Chick Port. So lively! So colorful! So totally about to luck Bruce's butt!

TWO GAMERS ENTER, ONE GAMER WINS



Bruce Geryk
When he's not writing about
nerdy war games, Bruce
Geryk spends his days putting a hard-earned medicel
degree to good use.



Tom Chick
In addition to being one of
the videogame industry's most
prolitic freelance journalists.
Tom also runs the popular
webeite QuarterToThree.com

because his huge collection of cards for that vampire collectible card game got him started on a *Civ IV* lycanthrope mod. Don't expect us to play it for this column, though, because it's not going to happen. Back in the non-paranormal universe, I've founded Hinduism, met the French, and researched the priesthood. And that's what I did on my summer vacation.

TOM, 1700 B.C.: Actually, something more pathetic than England without a navy is England without copper or iron. Having just learned the secret of bronze working and therefore the location of copper, I am dismayed to see the Mongols and Russians squatting haughtily on the closest sources. Time to make a beeline for metal casting, so I can tocate nearby iron.

BRUCE, 1200 B.C.: There is a stone deposit south of Tom's cultural border that's just asking for me to grab it. Unfortunately, Tom has also spotted it and has a settler poised to build a city on his next turn. I can grab it this turn if I accept crappy terrain. And I do. Hence, Cordoba. Now all I need is John Henry.

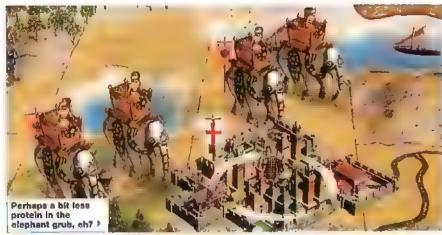
TOM, 1200 B.C.: Who needs stone when you have Stonehenge, which was just built in Tomopois? "In ancient times, hundreds of years before the dawn of history, an ancient race of people, the druids. No one knows who they were or what they were doing," Quote?

BRUCE, 1000 B.C.: Tom keeps messaging me every turn and asking me to read my Civ score breakdown because he can't be eve I'm winning. What's actually happened is that I managed to block off a significant portion of our continent with cities, trapping a lot of land on my side of the culture line. I'm now pouring my resources into obelisks and libraries and trying to keep the borders expanding so that no one can found any cities on the far side of my territory. If I can keep this land walled off, I can eventually grab a lot of resources.

TOM, 900 B.C.: Moses in the house, y'a.l!
He just moseyed into Tomopolis to check out
Stonehenge. I tell Moses he's in the wrong place
and send him to set up shop in Chick Port,
which will one day be a center of commerce and
research with grocers and universities.

BRUCE, 750 B.C.: Tom may have Moses, but I'm way ahead of him in ancient-Egyptian-related historica, re-creation. Thanks to the stone resource t hosed Tom out of, I'm building the pyramids at double-quick speed. This will give me access to every government civic in the game, including Tom's favorite, police state, which will allow him to re-create his beloved communism.

TOM, 60 B.C.: The Mongols just deciared war on me. That wouldn't be so bad if I could defend myself with something other than sticks. Without copper or iron, all I have are archers and clubwielding warriors to stand up to the five swords-





After poor response to their comeback album, the Supromes go on a drunkon rempage.

men, four archers, and three axmen marching toward Tomopolls. Remember when A.I. used to just dribble in one or two units at a time? I miss those days

BRUCE, A.D. 1: I'm trying to think of a way to announce that I've just built the pyramids in Madrid, while at the same time sounding suitably "street" and keeping it real in general, but I've just realized that Tom is being embarrassing enough for the both of us.

TOM, A.D. 240: Zoroaster in the house, y'all: "So what's this Stonehenge I've heard so much about?" he asks. I show him. He's impressed. I offer him a permanent position at Chick Port. Unfortunately, he can't leave town yet because of all the Mongols running around merrily pilitaging everything. When the war blows over, he'll join Moses at Chick Port's university. One day, kids will anxiously await letters of acceptance from UCP. They'll spend their freshmen years in Moses House and will have keg parties in the woods behind the Zoroaster Building.

BRUCE, A.D. 300: There's really nothing more embarrassing than an adult over the age of 30 using pimp talk, unless it's an adult over the age of 30 using pimp talk from 10 years ago. I take that



 Knighta liberate an English city from barbarians. Really big barbarians.

back: The only thing more embarrassing would be said adult using pimp talk while recounting an elaborate backstory involving conversations with game characters. But whatever, I'm just focusing on Tom's ability to generate great prophets at such a rate.

TOM, A.D. 320: The Mongot wars are finally over, but I'm screwed. While everyone else has spent the last 400 years expanding, I've been hunkered down behind my city walls watching Mongols knock over everything my workers built. Now I'm reduced to a sliver of undeveloped land stretching from my inland capital to my single port. I've got Spain to my left, Russia above me, and the Mongol bulities to my right. None of my neighbors likes me. Time to suck up to the French and maybe harass Bruce a bit.

BRUCE, A.D. 440: Tom just fried to take Cordoba away from me. I keep the city but lose the quarry to pillagers. On the other side of the map, the French are throwing war elephants at Barcelona, which is forcing me to keep making spearmen and archers.

TOM, A.D. 520: Up to now, my Francophilia has consisted of things like trading silver for cows, optics for monarchy, or compass plus 100 gold for war on Bruce. In an act of desperation, 1 decide >

WHO NEEDS STONE WHEN YOU HAVE STONEHENGE, WHICH WAS JUST BUILT IN TOMOPOLIS? "IN ANCIENT TIMES, HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE THE DAWN OF HISTORY, AN ANCIENT RACE OF PEOPLE, THE DRUIDS. NO ONE KNOWS WHO THEY WERE OR WHAT THEY WERE DOING."



▲ "You must pay the rent!" "I can't pay the rent!" "But you must pay the rent!" "But I can't pay the rent!"



A Hey everyone, thanks a ten for teaching us about literature and stuff. We're totally going to attack you all now, OK?

to give the French an entire city. Gateway was built on my west border to keep Russia and Spain back. Now I give it to Napoleon. Love me, France. Love me! Or, at the very least, stand between me and my enemies.

BRUCE, A.D. 920: I paid the French to make peace by giving them theology. This makes them merely annoyed with me, as opposed to furious, but they just love themselves some Tom Chick. I console myself with the new role-playing character that just popped up in Madrid: Archimedes.

TOM, A.D. 1000: A.D. 1000 is a very big year, and not just for milliennialist wackos. I just started building plantations on the spice fields around Tomopolis, which will not only establish England as the birthplace of the culinary arts but also give me trade fooder for my friends and not-so-friends. Unfortunately, the Russians just declared war, so no spice for them. Let them eat bland food! I pay the French to jump in on my side and the Mongols to hopefully mind their own damn business for once

BRUCE, A.D. 1000: Everyone wants theology, I just gave it to the Russians to attack Tom. Keeping the A.I. pointed at other players is the way to go in multiplayer *Civ IV* games. In fact, it's the way to go in pretty much every multiplayer game ever.

TOM, A.D. 1200: Land, ho! My caravel catches sight of the New World. Oh, and I call d.bs! My best hope is to escape the violent crowded ways of the Old World for the more peaceful neighborly pursuit of conquering native settlements.

BRUCE A.D. 1300: I've got massive upkeep problems. Civ IV has radically changed the dynamics of expansion from previous games, which is something I'm only finding out now. Woe to those with nine or more cities. I'm down to a 40 percent science rate, and even making Galileo or whoever work a second job at El Wendy's isn't keeping my economy from slowly sinking in the paella.

TOM, A.D. 1520: The Visigoths in the New World teach my explorer the secrets of literature, which makes *The Visigoth Chronicles* mandatory reading at UCP. Now to establish a presence near these well-read Visigoths so I can conquer them. I'm all, like, "Hey guys, thanks for loaning

me the books. Do you mind if I take your city, too?" Also, I manage to make peace with Russia for the low, low price of 40 gold, Also, Mahavira in the house, y'all! I have no idea who this guy is, but I'll take him.

BRUCE, A.D. 1660: Kublai Khan is annoyed with me, and I can't even talk to Napoleon, who just sacre bleuls me every time I click on his name. Peter is the only A.I. who will negotiate with me, and I pay him 100 gold that I can't really spare to attack Tom again.

TOM, A.D. 1665: I have good news and bad news. The good news is that England is so outta here: A galleon with two settlers just set sail for the New World. The bad news is that the Second Russian War just started and it looks dire. Russian war etephants and catapults are bearing down on my capital. But I've got about a billion archers left over from the Mongol wars, so I can probably hold out

about he who lives by the sword something something, but I was too busy stashing up other clvs to pay attention. Now I get hit by the French and the Mongols simultaneously, with war elephants coming in from the north and Mongol axmen moving in from the east. Because I've been enjoying the new *Civ IV* ability to really play the culture/science game, and because my economy isn't strong enough to support a lot of city defenders, I'm kind of screwed unless I get lucky.

TOM, A.D. 1675: Mark this date in your calendars. It's the year an English caravel circumnavigated the world and gained a +1 movement bonus for all English ships. As they say in Tomopolis "Macellan who?"

BRUCE, A.D. 1690: So much for being lucky The Mongols take Madrid and I come up one chariot short of taking it back on a counterattack. That door closes forever as a couple horse archers arrive to take up the defense, and shortly thereafter, Barcelona falls to the French war elephants that have been bariging their heads up against if the entire game. In one turn I go from first to almost last.

TOM, A.D. 1695: Mark this date in your

calendars as well. It's the year that two English settlers arrived on the southern tip of a new world bountiful with silk, corn, dye, and my own personal favorite, iron. Sweet, sweet iron. We no longer have to beat back war elephants with archers and longbows. Get ready to taste English steel, you heathens. We call them that because we recently converted to Judaism.

BRUCE, A.D. 1700: If I can't win, at least I can try and make Tom loss. In 1700, the Spanish do verily grant eight cities as gifts to the mighty Russians, who they hope will rightly smits Tom unto the ends of the Earth, or at least the end of the game.

TOM, A.D. 1700: Bruce just catapulted Peter the Great from first place by a couple hundred points to first place by about 1500 points. The historical term for that is "sore loser." Fortunately for me, I've got a foothold in the New World and the technological edge to exploit it. And since this article is called Tom vs. Bruce and not Tom vs. Peter, I'll just fast-forward through some highlights

Over the next 100 years, the Visigoths actually manage to capture one of my new cities. Using my new iron, I launch a crusade of three knights to recapture my city and then move against the Visigoth city. A few decades later they're joined by redcoats, who are the English unique units. Together, they take a few developed barbarian cities, leaving me to plug in the gaps with English settlers. By 1850, the entire continent is mine.

As the cities grow, I channel my resources into culture. This wreaks haved in the Old World, pushing my borders out because everyone wants what England's got. I eventually assimilate cities like Gateway, which I had given to France; Cordoba, which Bruce built for its stone quarry; and every Mongol city except their capital. I even push the border back to claim all of Peter's gem mines and a bunch of his lovely towns. By the time history comes to an end in 2050, the Old World is a big lat English core surrounded by colored shreds representing the patchwork territories of France, England, and Mongols.

As for Bruce? His last city fell to France in the mid-119th century. France, Ha-ha./

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SHE DIDN'T GET THE HINT AT CHRISTMAS. THERE'S STILL VALENTINE'S DAY.

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I PLACE THE DUBIOUS HONOR OF LAUNCHING THE collectors' edition wallet rape trend, one that grows both in size and odiousness to this day, on two products released years ago almost simultaneously. Going over the top and then some in an effort to impress was the toddler coffin-cum-oversized game box of Ultima Ascension, which announced your hardcore gaming status more effectively than a siren and a blinking neon "L" upon your forehead would have, the forest's worth of trees harvested for its packaging telling the other mallgoers, as you and your buddies struggled to tote it to the parking lot, "Soon my ass shall match this box in enormity, for I shall not move from my PC until I have completed this lurching, incomplete mess." Trying less hard but still collecting plenty of money was the limited edition of Quake III: Arenaor, as I like to call it. Quake in a Can-which came packaged in, well, a tin can. For \$10 more than the original price.

Two very different approaches, to be sure, but the guiding principal was the same: Con gamers into shelling out extra for a bunch of nothing just by calling something a collectors' edition. How does a booklet of concept art deemed unfit for use in the two years of magazine previews preceding a game's release add value to the play experience? You've got me, but then I didn't understand how the few thousand copies of Quake III dumped in a metal container made playing that game better either.

I could understand it if this were a case of getting something for nothing, the way Sugar Pops cereal used to have Bobby Sherman 45s you could cut off the back of the box. All that cost you was a little dental health, one phonograph needle, and a large share of dignity. But game publishers aren't giving gamers those HeroClix figures and art books and whatnot for free-they're charging extra. A lot extra, sometimes. The noncollectors' edition games are quickly becoming the exception, and that's just a shame—they have just as much a right to an unearned portion of your money as these other games, and I have a few ideas on how to make a collectors' edition actually collectible. While I should be charging companies for these pearls of brilliance, I'll share a few of these concepts here as a gesture of good faith.

Black & White 2: Opening the box triggers a special laser that swiftly incinerates all the cones in your eyes, leaving you color blind so you can experience the game in true black and white. Even better, the game ships with a paddleball so that you can fill the time the game runs with something that approximates actual entertainment

Hammer & Sickle: Only 1,000 boxes of this game will be the collectors' edition noncollecting edition, featuring a sort of "Nesting Doll" packaging that includes a still-shrink-wrapped copy of the game within the box as well as a pristine store receipt so you can return it and never subject yourself to the crushing disappointment lurking within,

The Bard's Tale: I call this The Bard Gets Hard...Core edition, For just \$15 more, this lute-shaped box gives graying gamers who played the original games in the series the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all the other Bard fogies so they can get together and show off the maps they made 15 years ago and haven't been able to bring themselves to throw away since. The resulting organization will be run by an elite group known as the Code Wheels.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Chaos Theory: How many more units

WHAT DO GAME COMPANIES HORE TO GAIN FROM COLLECTORS EDITIONS? FOLD A TO B FOLD A TO B

MOST GAME COMPANIES ARE OFFERING GOODIES BEYOND YOUR CAPACITY TO DREAM OR WISH

could Ubisoft move if it packed in a real set of night-vision goggles. with this popular title? As long as they point out that the hardware should increase players' chances of at long last sneaking a glimpse of a real-life girl, plenty.

Indigo Prophecy: Gamers shelling out the extra dough for The Untold Story Edition will actually have to play the game to get their extra \$20 worth of value, but it will be worth it; instead of the rushed, head-scratching, "I Got Nuthin" third act of the original game, players will be treated to a real, coherent, well-paced ending! One caveat-all the action will be depicted through a series of crude Etch A Sketch renders, since the developers clearly ran out of the necessary time and money to actually create this material. Still, it beats the riddle inside a conundrum wrapped in BS that shipped with the game.

These are just the tip of the iceberg. I've got a million more. Take this column for instance—that headline isn't a ruse. This Limited Edition Special Unique Super-Scorched Version of Scorched Earth offers bonus insight into this phenomenon. Your bonus material is in the illustration: Just fold it in, Mad Magazine style, and you'll see. Added value and enjoyment for the gamer, that's what it's all about, Right? / Robert Coffey

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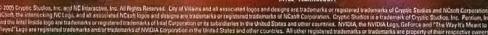








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